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ALL-PARTY PLEA TO END ACTS OF OPPRESSION

REPRESENTATIVES of many national political parties have joined to sign a statement calling upon the Indian Government to "bring all legitimate and moral pressure on the Government of Sri Lanka to terminate acts of oppression against the Tamil people" and to take immediate and urgent measures to end the sufferings of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

The statement which expressed concern at the "total indifference of the Government of Sri Lanka to the sufferings of the Tamil people in permitting the army atrocities" was signed by Mr. L. K. Advani (BJP) Mr. P. Upendra (Telugu Desam), Mr. Indrajit Gupta (CPI), Mr. S. P. Malaviya (Lok Dal), Mr. A. G. Kulkarni (Cong.-S), Mr. Saifuddin Soz (National Conference), Mr. Bapu Kaldate (Janata), Mr. Nagen Saikia (AGP), Mr. V. Gopalaswamy, Mr. N. V. N. Somu (DMK), Mr. Aladi Aruna (AIADMK), Mr. Chitta Basu (Forward Bloc) and Lt. Gen. Arora (Akali Dal).

The indiscriminate killings through search and destroy operations, the strafing and shelling, the indiscriminate mass arrests of Tamil youth, their being tortured and held incommunicado, the destruction of houses, schools and hospitals and the total destruction of Tamil villages were cited as evidence of the continuing violations of human rights, in the statement. It accused the Sri Lankan Government of deliberately cutting off food and medical supplies to Tamil areas, of depriving Tamil refugees of relief and ignoring the reports of international humanitarian agencies like Amnesty International which had sought to draw attention to the human rights violations in Sri Lanka.

The statement was released at a press conference convened by the PROTEG and the Friends of Eelam at the conclusion of their relay fast which had been intended to focus attention on the continuing human rights violations in the island.

Expressing his appreciation of the support received from the national political parties as embodied in the joint statement to be presented to the Prime Minister, Mr. S. C. Chandrahasan, President, PROTEG, said the offer to split the Eastern Province into three, made by the Sri Lankan President in Bangalore had already been rejected by the TULF in its second round of talks with him in Colombo and for Mr. Jayawardene "to spring this offer as if something new" showed his insincerity. "We do not feel this meets in any way the aspirations of the Tamil people and the fact that despite the efforts of the Indian Government, he has not come out with anything more, shows he is not sincere".

Further proof of insincerity, he said, was the fact that just before the SAARC summit, the Sri Lanka armed forces had begun a major offensive against the Jaffna peninsula, bombarding it from the sea. "It's a totally unprovoked attack, no Tamil militant activity had preceded it," he said.

Sauce For The Goose . . .

THE SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT apparently thinks that what is sauce for the British goose is not sauce for the Eelam gander. Sri Lanka was, according to the international media, one of only three countries to vote for the United Kingdom resolution that the inhabitants of the Falklands (Malvinas, as the Argentinians call it), have the right to self-determination. The two other countries voting with Sri Lanka were Belize (population 150,000) and Oman (850,000).

The U.K. resolution was a counter to the Argentina-sponsored resolution – passed recently in the UN General Assembly, with an overwhelming majority – asserting Argentina's sovereignty over the Malvinas.

This is Sri Lanka's second diplomatic gaffe involving Argentina. On a previous occasion too, Sri Lanka had backed Britain and voted against Argentina in the UN General Assembly.

Sri Lanka's pro-British stance resulted in Argentina sponsoring a motion against Sri Lanka at the Annual Convention of the UN Human Rights Commission held in Geneva in November 1985.

A political observer wryly comments:

Sri Lanka is all for the right to self-determination –provided the people involved (in this case, the descendants of British sheep-farmers) live thousands of miles away. Besides, can Argentina gift us another Victoria Dam project?

His tart summing-up:

for Sri Lanka, the right to self-determination doesn't, unlike charity, begin at home.

(Saturday Review, 29/11/86)

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THE CENTRAL QUESTION

IT COMES as no surprise that the Sri Lankan Tamil side, militant Tamil groups and the TULF, has rejected the government's proposal for the trisection of the eastern province of Sri Lanka. There is no doubt that, in putting forward this proposal to the Indian Prime Minister during the recently held SAARC summit, President Jayawardene was trying to create the impression that his proposal approximated to the Tamil demand for a single Tamil linguistic unit.

Even after decades of overt and covert attempts at state-aided colonisation of vast areas of the eastern province by Sinhalese brought from outside with a view to transforming the Tamil speaking people into a minority community even in their traditional homeland, fortunately these attempts have not yet succeeded and the Tamil speaking people (Tamils and Muslims) continue to remain the predominant majority. The conflict has reached a stage that no more state-aided colonisation can take place in these areas without the risk of inviting retaliatory violence. The 'balkanisation' of the eastern province into three minor provinces, namely a Sinhala majority Trincomalee province, a Tamil majority Batticaloa province and a Muslim majority Amparai province, does not constitute a favour done to the Tamils or the Muslims, but is a devious design to consolidate the recently created 'Sinhala enclaves' in the eastern province on a permanent basis. What is more outrageous is that the proposal envisages the entire traditional Tamil district of Trincomalee to be incorporated into a Sinhala majority province.

The post-SAARC summit days witnessed an atmosphere of optimism and euphoria about the prospects of a 'quick settlement' of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. The statements made by Rajiv Gandhi and the number of high profile trips made by Indian Ministers to Colombo reflected this optimism. The banner headlines in the Sri Lankan media and some of the speeches by Jayawardene's Ministers in Colombo gave the impression that the Tamil militants were going to be whipped into line by India.

The seizure of weapons and the house arrests of Tamil militant leaders followed by the confiscation of some of their communications equipment reinforced the view in Colombo that India had decided to engage in an exercise of arm-twisting of the militants to the point of submitting to Colombo's proposals.

There is one thing that neither New Delhi nor Colombo has so far been able to comprehend, and that is the strength and depth of feeling for the Sri Lankan Tamils and their plight amongst the mass of the people of Tamil Nadu. The Sri Lankan Tamil question is no longer an external question as far as Tamil Nadu is concerned. For better or worse, it has become part and parcel of Tamil Nadu politics. Following the Choolamedu shooting incident, while there was subdued reaction to the action of the Tamil Nadu police against the militants, opinion swiftly changed and swung back in support of the militants. The announcement of the confiscation of the communications equipment belonging to the militants provoked widespread protests. The well-timed move by the LTTE leader in launching his 'fast unto death' demanding the return of the equipment and the lifting of police surveillance evoked such spontaneous sympathy that the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu promptly acceded to his demands and appealed to him to give up his fast.

There have been a great deal of 'new ideas', 'clarifications' and 'fresh formulations' exchanged between Colombo and New Delhi in regard to the peace proposals. However, there is no doubt that the major sticking point is the question of the Tamil demand for a merger of the northern and eastern provinces into a single unit of devolution. This demand crystallises the longstanding legitimate Tamil aspiration to preserve their national identity within a definable territorial unit where they could administer their own affairs, assuring themselves of the physical security they have been lacking, particularly during the last three decades. New Delhi and Colombo must address their minds to this central question if a lasting solution for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is to be achieved.

European Parliament on Peace in Sri Lanka

THE FOLLOWING is the resolution on the present peace efforts on Sri Lanka adopted by the European Parliament at its last session held recently:

Deeply concerned at the continuing civil strife in Sri Lanka between certain militant Tamil organisations and the Sri Lanka security forces which, since 1982, has resulted in a great number of deaths, including many civilians.

Having regard to the latest proposals of the Government of Sri Lanka for a devolution of power to elected provincial councils, which have emerged as the result of a series of negotiations held since 1983 between the various parties involved.

Noting that these proposals will be discussed at a Conference to be held in the near future, to which all Sri Lanka political parties, as well as the militant Tamil organisations, would be invited.

Notes that the present proposals of the Government of Sri Lanka have evoked positive responses from several political groups in Sri Lanka, including the Tamil United Liberation Front.

Hopes that an agreement will be reached at such a Conference on the basis of these proposals, certain aspects of which still need to be discussed.

Hopes, moreover, that such an agreement would be accompanied by a lasting cease-fire between the Sri Lankan security forces and the militant Tamil groups, would provide a just, lasting and harmonious peace for all the communities in Sri Lanka, and would respect democracy, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of that country.

Calls on the Foreign Ministers meeting in Political Co-operation to express their support for a negotiated settlement to the present situation in Sri Lanka and to provide such support as may be needed and requested to facilitate a full settlement.

Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the Foreign Ministers meeting in Political Co-operation and to the Governments of Sri Lanka and India.

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WHAT HOPE FOR SRI LANKA?

Jonathan Fryer, a writer on international affairs, has recently been to Sri Lanka (in November '86) to assess the prospects for peace against the backdrop of the latest moves by India to find a solution to a continuing civil war that is progressively decimating its Tamil population and constitutes a severe strain on a failing economy.

When I first visited Sri Lanka three years ago, it was a baptism of fire. By coincidence, I landed on the very Monday in July when riots broke out in the capital, Colombo. Pillars of smoke rose with increasing frequency from houses and shops that had been set alight, as I was driven in from the airport, and only hours later, screaming mobs were in the streets. Gangs of youths from the majority Sinhala community were attacking the businesses of minority Tamils, and in the worst instances, dragging people out into the street, where they were beaten or killed. For days, the city was in turmoil, sometimes under curfew, sometimes not. People trying to shop for basic necessities would suddenly run as they heard rumours of bombs allegedly left by Tamil terrorists – such as the Tigers – whose attacks on soldiers had been one of the immediate causes of the riots. Perhaps that was why so many of the soldiers – as I saw with my own eyes – stood by and did nothing as the mobs rampaged, and terrified Tamils tried to reach the safety of guarded temple compounds, or the homes of Sinhala friends, who were prepared to risk their own lives and property by sheltering them. The whole thing was like a nightmare, with such scenes occurring in many parts of the country. Sri Lanka had been so often described as a Paradise but Paradise had apparently been lost.

Deceptive Impression

Going back three years later, it is hard to imagine most of that happened. Colombo gives no impression of a city that has been traumatised. Though tourism has suffered badly from the adverse publicity over the troubles, other business seems to be thriving.

Most of the burnt-out shells of the Tamil shops along the main route south, Galle Road, have been replaced. But there are many invisible changes. Thousands of Tamils have left; others have come in from areas where they felt even more unsafe. And many Sinhalese have also moved away from the areas where Tamils predominate, also fear for their lives. Besides, the impression given by the capital and other towns in the south is deceptive.

"The situation is quite different from the situation that prevails in the northern province, particularly today outside the Jaffna peninsula, and in parts of the eastern province. In my view a de facto civil war is taking place", says a prominent Tamil political analyst, living in Colombo who also added, *"The disruption of normal life and the suffering the ordinary people experience is quite unreal even to people who live in other parts of the country . . . So far as the Tamils are concerned, they live under a tremendous sense of insecurity. The atmosphere in the north and east is largely an atmosphere of brutal confrontation, of tremendous dislocation, of personal tragedy. There is not even . . . a single family in those areas which has not been personally affected by the conflict, in terms of a member of the family being detained or who has left the country as a displaced person, or who has suffered some kind of tragedy, in terms of destruction of property, means of livelihood, etc., etc. . . ."*

Despite Sri Lanka's frequent claim that it is a "five star democracy", many Tamils feel they are unrepresented. This is cited by some as one reason for the success of radical militant groups, several of which use violence to further their cause. They believe that Tamils have been discriminated against far too long in Sri Lanka and only self rule can give them the freedom they want.

But not everybody sees it like that. The National Security Minister, Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali, who is a Sinhalese, sums up the central contradiction: *"Tamils felt discriminated against, but the Sinhalese felt it was the Tamils that were discriminating against them and that they were not getting a fair share. So it is really this problem that psychologically speaking, you have two minorities in this country. Or all communities are minorities."*

Minority Complex

As Sinhalese make up almost exactly threequarters of the total population, it is hard to understand their minority complex, until one remembers that just over the narrow strip of water that separates Sri Lanka from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu live about 40 million Tamils with close contact with their kinsmen on the island. Indeed, during the past three or four years, well over 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils have gone to India to escape the troubles, and most of the Tamil political and militant groups have officers or headquarters there. This is why India's role in trying to sponsor a peace settlement in Sri Lanka is so crucial, though as yet success has eluded them.

One reason for that failure is undoubtedly that many Tamils, especially in the north and east, do not trust the Sri Lankan government, and in particular the army, because of excesses by the security forces since 1983. Mr. Athulathmudali admits that there were problems, saying this is largely because the army was not trained for the situation it had to face. He says:

"It was a ceremonial army until it had to get down to work, and we had some rather bad incidents. And we had a problem in that we couldn't bring them to court martial because there was no evidence, nobody was prepared to testify and say that it was he or this group that did it. So we had to resort to a resurrection of the old royal perogative, where you know the King can say, 'I don't need your services any longer'. That way, we got rid of nearly 300 people in the police, army, navy and air force whenever we had some suspicion that things were not quite right. But I think that such incidents have reduced sharply. And of course we have been drilling into them, particularly since I came, that all Tamils are not terrorists, and you can't go against the entire community, preaching this. Our battle is only with those who have taken to violence."

Similarly not all Sinhalese are chauvinists or thugs, though, unfortunately, small elements of both have done considerable damage to the island's community relations. But many local commentators believe that the real damage was done years ago, at the time of Sri Lanka's independence from Britain, especially after Sinhala was made the country's official language 30 years ago, which the Tamils felt put them at a disadvantage. Worse still, separate education for Tamils and Sinhalese meant that today's generation, unlike its forefathers, grew up not knowing the other community intimately. This has strengthened the sense of alienation of many Tamils, and has encouraged many to leave.

Some of course, may be looking for a life with better prospects in Europe or North America, but others consider themselves refugees from persecution.

One group that feels there certainly is an alternative to violence or dictation on both sides is a Gandhian style movement called Sarvodaya, which preaches a message of reconciliation, co-operation and self-help. Headed by a man called Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, Sarvodaya claims an active support of three million people or about one in five of the population.

Human Rights Violations

Mr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, the TULF man, would also like to think that it was possible for people to work together, but feels it is difficult for that to happen until the sort of human rights issues raised in a recent report from Amnesty International are tackled satisfactorily. *"It is one of the deep tragedies of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka that people's responses to gross violations of human rights are conditioned by the ethnicity of the victim, and I feel very disturbed that not enough liberal opinion in the country, from whatever community people may belong to, is not responding to reports of this nature. This is essentially reflecting a deep crisis in the legal system, the judicial processes, in our own society, which should compel us to critically*

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DOCTORS PROTEST

The Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) has protested over the issue of 'Personal Particulars Form' to medical practitioners according to Dr. Sunil Ratnapriya, Secretary, GMOA.

The Personal Particulars Forms which have been issued to the GMOA by the Teaching Hospitals Ministry has requested particulars like the political party to which they belong, the political party the Medical Officer's father belonged and other details.

He also said that it was absurd to be asked whether the applicant had any connection with terrorists and such like.

The GMOA has issued written instructions to its branch unions asking them not to complete these forms. GMOA members have asked the parent body in Colombo how they should respond to the questionnaire, Dr. Ratnapriya said.

The GMOA had already written to the Secretary, Dr. Daya Samarasinghe of the Teaching Hospitals Ministry to have these forms withdrawn immediately.

India Gifts Medicines To Jaffna Hospital

A large consignment of essential medicines urgently required by the Jaffna Hospital in north Sri Lanka was handed over by the Acting High Commissioner of India Mr. K. R. Sinha to the Director-General in the Ministry of Teaching Hospitals, Dr. Lucien Jayasuriya and Dr. Nathchinarkiniyar, the Superintendent of the Jaffna Hospital, according to a news release by the Indian High Commission.

The Deputy Director-General in the Ministry of Teaching Hospitals, Dr. Sanat Gunasekara was also present at the presentation ceremony held on November 12, 1986 at India House.

These medicines were requested by the people and doctors of Jaffna and the gift was specially authorised by the Prime Minister of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi.

The value of the consignment is over SL. Rs. 400,000.

Tanks For The Army

The Sri Lanka Army is to buy a fleet of light tanks, according to the 1987 budget estimates giving an indication of the government's seriousness in fighting 'terrorists'.

The military declined to say from where they hoped to buy the tanks or what type they would be.

The tracked squadron together with two squadrons of armoured cars, for which provision has also been made, will cost about Rs. 254 million, according to the estimates.

The Air Force will also get 12 armoured cars for which Rs. 8.6 million has been allocated.

The estimates also show a phenomenal increase in the expenditure for the Special Task Force which has risen from Rs. 51.6 million this year to Rs. 200 million for 1987, of which Rs. 20 million will be spent on weapons and special equipment.

FRENCH DOCTORS TO THE RESCUE

A report from the Sri Lankan Ministry of Rehabilitation has stated that the Government has granted permission for a group of French doctors to work in Government Hospitals in the North and East. This move is necessitated by the fact that efficient and qualified doctors are reluctant to work in these areas due to violence and prevailing tensions.

RAPED AND GUNNED DOWN

The General Officer Commanding the Joint Operation Forces visited Amparai on 20th November with two Senior Army Officers to inquire into the recent incidents where 20 Tamils were killed and 21 reported missing due to Army excesses when Government Forces ran amok in Periya-Pullumalai (Amparai District) in east Sri Lanka.

The Inquiry was held in the Batticaloa Police Headquarters. 35 witnesses, relatives of the dead and missing, gave evidence at the inquiry. In the course of the inquiry it was revealed that 3 married women were raped by Government soldiers and later 2 of the victims were gunned down by the Forces.

Hospital Shelled

Doctors, nurses and other employees of the Manthikai Hospital in northern Sri Lanka staged a walk out on 12th November after the hospital was shelled from the air. The office of the District Hospital, the Library and the Wards were badly damaged.

They have lodged a protest with the Minister of Health, the President and the Minister of National Security over this 'dastardly incident.'

DEAD BODY FOUND AFTER ARREST

15.11.86 – A young Tamil man named Iruthayan Michael Collins was taken into custody by a unit of the Sri Lankan security forces at Akkaraipathu. Subsequently, his dead body was found at Thirukkovil.

* * *

RELEASED AND SHOT

23.11.86 *– In a rounding up operation by police commandos at Coolavady Colony, three Tamil civilians were shot dead. A further 20 were seriously injured and over 200 were taken into custody. Of those killed was Eustace Kasothar, aged 23, who was released only an hour earlier after three months detention.*

* * *

HEADS SHAVEN & PARADED

27.11.86 *– Tamil political detainees held in the Kathiraveli army camp in the eastern province of Batticaloa have had their heads shaven forcibly, and later paraded along the streets.*

BISHOP LAKSHMAN REMEMBERED

A meeting was held at St. John's College Hall, Chundikuli, Jaffna on Saturday, 1st November to commemorate Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe.

This meeting was held under the auspices of the **Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE)** and was presided over by Rev. Fr. Jeyaseelan, the President of the Local Branch of the MIRJE.

The Guest Speakers were Rev. Fr. Yohan Devananda and Rev. Fr. Paul Casperz. Mr. K. Nesjah also spoke. Mr. Rajan Hoole proposed a vote of thanks.

MEDICOS CALL FOR END TO SHELLING OF HOSPITAL

THE following is the text of a letter sent by the Medical Students Union of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna to Sri Lankan President Jayawardene.

"We, the medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna, would like to bring to your notice the very serious inconveniences and dangers which we face, even after continuous presentation of our grievances to the relevant authorities.

After the shelling of the hospital in late September/October, in which the hospital was damaged, we sent a protest letter to the Secretary of Defence, through the Chairman, University Grants Commission, requesting urgently that on humanitarian grounds the hospital be spared from any sort of military action. We also undertook a protest march to present our grievances to the Vice-Chancellor. We have attached herewith a copy of the letter sent to the Chairman UGC.

On 29th October, a staff member of the Faculty of Medicine, attached to the Obstetrics and Gynaecology department, Mr. M. Kumarasingam, was injured from a shell fired from the Fort which fell in front of the hospital entrance. The hospital authorities strongly deny that there was any provocation from within the hospital premises.

Due to these irresponsible actions, the whole hospital staff have decided to stop work until an assurance is received that there will be no further military action on or near the General Hospital of Jaffna.

We are unable to attend to our clinical studies under the circumstances. If the present situation continues, the final year examinations will have to be postponed, and this will cause inconvenience to all concerned. The responsibility for this will be on the government.

We strongly appeal to you, on humanitarian grounds, to stop any further military actions on or near the General Hospital of Jaffna."

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TAMILS: THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM

In August 1986 a group of 155 Tamils hit world headlines by being found adrift in two lifeboats off the Canadian coast. Though their exodus is not on the scale of the Vietnamese boat people, Tamil refugees have had a far-reaching effect on legislation and attitudes concerning refugees generally.

In Sri Lanka the violence has increased over the past year and any peace settlement seems far away. The majority of Tamils who have managed to escape have gone to India. The comparatively few seeking refuge in Europe find the doors shutting firmly against them.

In May 1985, after about 2,000 Tamils had arrived in Britain since the beginning of the year, the government introduced a visa requirement. More than a year later, in June 1986, the government finally granted exceptional leave to remain to those who had arrived before that time.

Because of the visa requirement very few Tamils have been able to reach Britain since May 1985. Of the few who have, an alarmingly high proportion have had to spend long periods in detention while their applications are assessed – in spite of offers of help from BRC and other groups in finding accommodation for them. BRC has expressed serious concern to the Home Office, particularly as some Tamils have now spent more than six months in detention.

Britain is not alone in restricting refugees' rights of entry. Germany and France have accepted over 20,000 Tamils since 1983, but at a meeting in May 1986 of the BRC-based European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), member agencies confirmed a hardening of government attitudes in their respective countries. West Germany particularly has taken harsh measures to prevent Tamils and other Third World refugees from slipping through from East Germany.

"Refugees in orbit" is a phrase now used to describe the small but growing number of refugees who are bounced back and forth between countries which refuse them entry.

BRC is pressing the British government to discuss this problem with other countries and to develop a humane and equitable policy which would avoid this situation.

BRC has been concerned that more and more Tamils are becoming "orbit" cases. Many flee initially to countries such as India, and then – because of family ties in Europe or because of threats by armed Tamil liberation groups in India – they move on to another country. However, the country they first visited is considered their "country of first asylum". Some Tamils have been sent back from Britain to these interim countries, only to be denied entry and returned to Britain.

BRC has drawn attention to these issues through the national media and through its own publications, as well as through regular meetings and correspondence with officials. The trend in Europe is towards even more restrictive attitudes, and voluntary agencies in every country are reporting standards of treatment of asylum-seekers which would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

(Extracts from British Refugee Council Report 1985–86)

WHAT HOPE FOR SRI LANKA?

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scrutinise the operation of laws like the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the problems of the arbitrary detention of people, the conditions of detention, the trials of persons who are accused of political offences, instead of triggering off this process of anguish, this process of deep reflection within our society, like, for example, what is taking place in Argentina under Alfonsin, or even under Cory Aquino in the post-Marcos period."

The government disputes many of Amnesty's allegations, and is bitter about some of the adverse publicity it has had as a result. But interestingly, it is not only the government which believes that the argument about the all-importance of ethnic divisions is false.

Dr. Ariyaratne, from a different perspective, feels that Sri Lanka's problems and divisions have other causes: *"I was one of those few people in the country who maintain that this was not an ethnic conflict. Because I have been working in all parts of the country, and the Sarvodaya Movement always had Sinhala and Tamil people working together, and, of course, Muslims. And in spite of the 1983 communalism and the total madness we had in this country, these people never brought those conflicts into the movement".* This leads Dr. Ariyaratne to be optimistic about the possibility of Tamils and Sinhalese working and living peacefully together.

Lalith Athulathmudali is also cautiously positive. He says that behind the scenes, opposing groups are talking to each other. *"The Tigers' commanders, who effectively run Jaffna town, even had dinner with their army counterparts the other day. Most ordinary Sri Lankans are tired of conflict, and the country can ill afford its cost."* Mr. Athulathmudali believes the government's new proposals do offer hope for an agreement, even though the initial reaction from the Tigers had been negative. He added, *"It would be a tragedy if we miss this. I don't think it will happen tomorrow but I think we are moving very very slowly but steadily on the route to a settlement."*

'Had I been a Tamil, I would have gone berserk'

(Excerpts from an interview with Dr. Tarzie Vittachi, former Editor of the Ceylon Observer by Rajika Wijenaike – Sunday Observer, October 5, 1966)

Q: *You have been an observer of the ethnic problem here since 1958. Would you say we are nearing a solution with the government's proposed Provincial Council system?*

A: When a family is overwhelmed by the pressures of life, it is best to agree on certain fences of behaviour and action. Good fences, after all, make good neighbours. That however, depends on which side the barbed wire is. The fencing must be fair.

Q: *What in your opinion, is the reason for the conflict in our society today?*

A: Conflict arises when people have no identity. Conflict arises when you deny another's identity. Speaking as a member of the majority community, I think it is the fundamental duty of the majority to respect and protect the cultural identity of the minority. I am glad that many of the majority community today support a united Sir Lanka. But I regret that very few of the minority community speak up for Sri Lanka. I would like to see more and more of the minority talking as Sri Lankans. I think I have earned the right to say this, for I have paid my dues. I've been in involuntary self-exile with my family because some people at the time resented my speaking up for the minorities and threatened the lives of my family.

Q: *There are a number of foreigners who criticise the government of Sri Lanka today. In your opinion, are we going in the right direction?*

A: What do you mean by 'right direction' putha? Personally, I can't stand these one-day three-day types who come here and pontificate about our country. They think only they know what is good for us. I think the present government has taken many steps to undo the harm done by previous governments. **I was abroad when the 'Sinhala Only' change took place. And I thought to myself that had I been a Tamil, I would have gone berserk.** And they have gone berserk. The government today is slowly but surely healing the wound. The scars, however, will remain for a long time to come.

Q: *Do you feel that language has any part to play?*

A: It most certainly has. The abolition of English created a lost generation that was unable to communicate. With the division of people into 'streams' the Sinhalese learnt in Sinhala, Tamils learnt in Tamil. There was no bridging language to join the two – except the elite who at least had the advantage of quarrelling over the language issue in English. We are a multi-racial society and we need a bridging language, or we each must learn the other's language. I think we need both. After all, if the Sinhalese can learn Botany and Physics, why can't they learn English and Tamil? You know there was a time I thought the language was just a means of communication – like 'Pass me the salt'. Now I know better. Language represents one's dreams. Words are the symbols of one's mind. Find out the language a person dreams in, counts in, curses in, and you know his cultural roots . . .

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"THE COUNTRY IS TIRED OF WAR"

Committee for Rational Development

SINCE its inception, the Committee for Rational Development has been urging the government to find a political solution to our current ethnic conflict. We have always argued that a political solution which has the support of the Indian Government and the international community, and which is acceptable to a vast majority of people in the North and the East is the only viable and realistic solution to our intractable ethnic conflict.

Therefore, though we have been strongly critical of the government in the last few years, we have supported the initiative of the present government to set in motion a process of peace negotiations on the basis of a realistic package which could form a starting point to negotiation and compromise. It is our belief that any government, whether UNP or SLFP, right or left, socialist or capitalist, will have to resolve the ethnic crisis through a devolution of power to the Tamil periphery. The relevant questions therefore are not whether devolution, but when and at what cost? **Opposition groups which resist the peace process will only inherit a greater problem if and when they come to power. The sooner a settlement is reached, the better result for all political sections within our national polity.**

In an article entitled 'A Negotiated Settlement is More Vital than Ever' which appeared in the Island of 5th April 1984, the CRD argued that a realistic package of devolution and a genuine and sincere attempt at negotiation will receive the backing of the Indian Government, the Tamil Nadu Government, a majority of Tamils living in the North and the East and the international community. During the last few weeks, we see that this very process of engagement and discussion is gradually taking place, putting enormous pressure on those who wish single-mindedly to pursue a military solution. We only hope that frustration with the slow nature of the process of negotiation will not lead to anticipatory, short-sighted, military thrusts on the part of the Sri Lankan Government. The pursuit of military options at every political juncture by the Sri Lankan Government only serves to destroy credibility and to isolate Sri Lanka both regionally and internationally. Given the nature of the consciousness of the Tamil people of the North and East, devolution cannot be imposed, it has to be accepted. Any imposed solution will lead us back within a short period to a cycle of violence and destruction. **The government must therefore be committed not only to a package of devolution but devolution which has the open or tacit consent of those living in the North and the East.**

As for the Tamil militant groups, the time surely has come for them to accept the processes of peace. No nationality is really strong enough to fight and win a war when it is regionally and internationally isolated. No cause justifies the sacrifice of thousands of civilians who will bear the brunt of an all out military confrontation in the North and East, especially if that sacrifice will only result in another period of military stalemate and another round of negotiations. **The militants must accept the fact that they too have no military solution to their search for Tamil Eelam. To fight for it at any cost is to lead the Tamil people toward genocide and humiliation.** The time has come to emphasise the political processes, to engage in a genuine attempt to find peace so that the people of the North and the East can emerge out of their current state of siege and insecurity and develop their own part of the country. **The Tamil people have made their point. Their political will can no longer be ignored by mainstream Sinhala politics.** The scheme of devolution currently being offered accepts the fact that they are people with a right to autonomy in the regions where they are a majority.

The CRD understands that there are many areas of contention with regard to current negotiations – the North-East merger, the problem of land, law and order more federal or less unitary. But, the time has come for these issues to be discussed and settled at the negotiation table and not in the "killing fields". The country is tired of this War. Those who prolong the fighting for their own vested interests and out of a sense of bravado will only lead the country, the people and themselves towards death and self-destruction.

Reggie Siriwardene

Setback in Sri Lanka

The rejection of the Sri Lanka Government's peace proposals by Tamil Militant groups is hardly surprising. The differences were clear from the very beginning. The proposals provided separate councils for northern and eastern provinces while the militants wanted the two to be combined into a single unit. Secondly, the proposals vested in the Central Government the right to dispose of Government land for inter-state irrigation and land development programmes. ***Given Sri Lanka Government's record of forced settlements to dilute the concentration of Tamils in areas where they were in a majority, the militants had demanded that the provinces be given the right to decide on this matter.*** *They were also unhappy with the extent of autonomy proposed to be given to the provinces.*

They viewed with disquiet not only parliament's powers to legislate even in respect of subjects within provincial jurisdiction but the powers of the Centre under the Reserved and Concurrent lists including control over law and order . . . by the Inspector-General of Police and the National Police Commission nor could they accept the President's sweeping emergency powers and the silence in the proposals on the future of plantation workers. The four points they had made at Thimpu last year included provision of citizenship rights to all Tamils who had made Sri Lanka their home.

The militants' rejection demolishes the hope some harboured for a decisive breakthrough towards a settlement during Mr. J. R. Jayawardene's visit to India to attend the summit of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Nevertheless, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi would do well to use the opportunity to persuade the Sri Lanka President to grant wider powers to the provincial councils and restrict the Centre's overlapping and overriding jurisdiction over provincial matters. Without such a step India will not be able to help in achieving a settlement within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. To be acceptable to the militants, the alternative to 'Eelam' must be substantial and attractive.

('Indian Express', 5.11.86)

DONS APPEAL FOR UNDERGRAD'S RELEASE

Text of the resolution passed by the University Science Teachers' Association of the University of Jaffna in north Sri Lanka at an emergency meeting held on 11th November:

The disappearance of A. Vijitharan, a third year commerce student, is a most disturbing event. We share the legitimate and grave anxiety of the student community in this matter and endorse the concern expressed by the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of the administration.

We also share the anxiety of Vijitharan's parents and of other students who are far from home. Their well-being is the responsibility of the staff and authorities of this University and of the people of Jaffna.

We appeal to whoever has knowledge of his disappearance to expedite his safe return and restore to Jaffna its good name.

Whatever ambitions and ideals the students cherish can bear fruit only if the work of learning continues and the University can hold its respect in the eyes of the world. We appeal to them for mature judgement in the exercise of their rightful social concerns without interrupting the work of learning.

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TAMIL MILITANTS' POSITION ON GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS

LTTE COMMENTS

On the proposals submitted by Sri Lankan Government

Shri M. G. Ramachandran,
Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu.

Having studied carefully the contents of the set of proposals submitted to us by the Sri Lankan Government, we find the framework inadequate, failing to meet the basic political aspirations of our people. The proposals refuse to consider any of the basic principles enunciated by us at the Thimpu talks last year.

The separate provincial councils framework negates our fundamental demand for the recognition of our homeland. We would like to emphasise that the Tamils have an inalienable right to their homeland. This homeland is a clearly identifiable, contiguous, single region composed of the Northern and Eastern provinces. This region is the historically constituted homeland of the Tamil-speaking people and therefore indivisible.

The recognition of the territorial integrity of the region as the homeland of the Tamils is cardinal to any meaningful, lasting solution to the Tamil national question. The framework offered by the Sri Lankan Government providing a scheme of devolution to the provinces bifurcates the territorial unity and contiguity of the Tamil homeland, and therefore fails to meet the legitimate aspirations of our people. The arguments advanced by the Sri Lankan Government that the Eastern Province is populated by the Sinhalese and the Muslims are unteniable. The Eastern Province is an integral part of the Tamil homeland inhabited predominantly by the Tamil-speaking people. The indigenous Tamils and the Tamil-speaking people of Islamic faith constitute the majority in the province and have lived as one people for centuries and shared a common language and territory. It is a well-known fact that successive Sri Lankan governments have been pursuing a deliberate policy of colonising the Tamil areas with Sinhalese people with the aim of disrupting the demographic composition of the population and dismembering the geographical contiguity of the Tamil region.

In this context, the Tamils have a legitimate fear that once the North and the East are separated into two units under the proposed framework, the territorial basis that unifies the character and the nature of their nationality is seriously undermined. We therefore insist that for any meaningful political settlement, the acceptance by the Sri Lankan Government of an indivisible single region as the homeland of Tamils is basic.

LTTE Leader V. Prabakaran

Having given a closer elucidation, we find that the package of proposals offered by the Colombo Government has serious inadequacies. The legislative and executive powers that are to be devolved to the provincial councils have been severely constrained by the perogative powers of Parliament and the Presidency and they are not real or concrete in conceptual and practical terms. The subjects devolved do not correspond, nor enjoy similar status as the Indian constitutional model in the State List and the Concurrent List, since the subjects are conflated into the unitary Constitution of Sri Lanka which is essentially chauvinistic and totalitarian in its structure with absolute political authority vested in the President.

The legislative powers accorded to the provincial councils to make statutes in respect of any matters set out in the provincial list (see article 154 G) become meaningless since Parliament has overriding legislative powers even in subjects falling within the sphere of the provinces. Provincial councils have to consult Parliament if the councils are to enact any legislation on the subjects in the Concurrent List. Therefore, the powers conferred on Parliament by the Constitution severely restrict the legislative powers of the provincial councils.

The President has limitless Emergency powers to act on his own under the screen of Emergency or any other situation which is considered by him as imminent danger to the country. Upon the declaration of Emergency, the President can dissolve any provincial council and assume the powers and responsibilities of the Chief Minister under the pretext of establishing public order. Furthermore, the President and his representative, the Governor, are given enormous powers over the validation of any Bill passed by the provincial councils. Any law proposed by the provincial councils can be set aside by the whims and fancies of the President.

In matters relating to law and order the framework offered by Sri Lanka provides overriding powers to the Centre. The IGP and the National Police Commission have total control over the provincial police authority. The IGP or the President has been given the power to appoint the DIG as the head of the provincial division, and thereby, instituting the Centre's authority on the provinces. Under the state of Emergency, the IGP has been given the power to deploy police units of the national division in the guise of maintaining and restoring public order in any province.

The super-imposition of a national police authority over the provincial police and the sweeping powers vested with the IGP and the President reduce the provincial police system to a powerless institution without adequate authority to ensure the security of the Tamil population.

The other crucial issue that does not resolve satisfactorily is the question of land. The Centre has absolute power over the use of land for inter-provincial irrigation and land development projects. The Government has also been given the power to utilise lands in respect of the subjects not devolved in the provincial councils. Furthermore, the alienation and disposition of land under provincial schemes will have to be ratified by the Governor.

In the context that the Sri Lankan Government has been engaged in an aggressive colonisation of Tamil lands under the guise of irrigation and development schemes, the proposals fail to secure the territorial integrity of the Tamil homeland from encroachment and annexation by the State.

We have briefly outined the basic flaws in the structure of the framework submitted by Sri Lanka. We wish to make it absolutely clear that any meaningful, lasting solution to the Tamil national question cannot be achieved unless Sri Lanka recognises the inalienable rights and legitimate political aspirations of our people, particularly their right to a homeland. We also wish to point out that if Sri Lanka is prompted by genuine desire for peace, it should put an end to State violence, to the ruthless killing of innocent Tamils, to the massive militarisation programmes, to the continuous erection of army camps in Tamil areas and seek to establish a condition of normality and peace.

In conclusion, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and to the Government of India for their earnest and genuine efforts to find a political settlement through peaceful negotiations. We wish to reiterate that our liberation movement will provide wholehearted support and cooperation to all efforts by the Government of India to find a lasting solution that would guarantee the liberty, dignity and security of our people.

Velupillai Prabakaran,
Leader and Military Commander,
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

ENLF RESPONSE

RESPONSE to the proposals emanating from the Sri Lankan Government-TULF talks mediated through the good offices of the Government of India – by ENLF.

Subsequent to the request from the Government of India conveyed to us by the Honourable Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at the meeting of the 26th October, 1986, to state our position on the proposals emanating from the talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the TULF, we are constrained to state:

1.1 *We totally reject the very premise on which the proposals are based, namely:*

(a) the maintenance of the unitary, non-secular character of the Sri Lankan Constitution, which is totally unacceptable and irrelevant to a country like Sri Lanka inhabited by two distinct nationalities and other national minorities.

(b) the non-acceptance of the fact and reality that the Eelam people not only constitute themselves as a distinct nationality (like the Sinhala people), but more importantly are

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SRI LANKA – A Messy Impasse

With the emphatic rejection by the Tamil militant organisations of the Sri Lankan Government's package of proposals on the devolution of power in the wake of the messy shooting incident in Madras involving some militants, new questions have emerged on the prolonged ethnic conflict in the island. What next?

WITH the five Tamil militant organisations emphatically rejecting the Sri Lankan Government's package of proposals to devolve power to the Tamil areas as "inadequate" – "failing to meet the basic, political aspirations of the Tamil people" – all attention seemed focussed on the meeting between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayawardene during the SAARC summit in mid-November in Bangalore, to rescue the peace process.

True, nobody expected the militants to accept the Colombo package on a silver platter, as it were, for the gap between what the Sri Lankan Government has offered and the basic aspirations of the Tamils, moderates as well as militants, is still formidable. The militants have pitched their rejection of the Sri Lankan proposals on the political high ground of the recognition of a single Tamil unit or region comprising the North and the East – the "indivisible homeland".

The militants' written responses to the proposals were submitted on November 3 to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran and Food Minister S. Ramachandran, both of whom have been recruited by the Centre to play an active role in the peace process. A week earlier, they had been handed the latest package of proposals including the TULF's response on the main issues and an Indian summary of the points that could be included in a broad framework. The constitutional adviser to the Government of India, S. Balakrishnan, a low-profile man playing an active role in interacting between the Sri Lankan Government's proposals and the TULF's responses and in putting down some of the propositions in a constitutional and legal form, was present during both the meetings.

Under Ominous Shadow

The militants' second meeting with M. G. Ramachandran took place under the ominous shadow of a brutally messy incident two days earlier on Deepavali day at Tiruvalluvarpuram in Choolaimedu, Madras city. Members of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), one of the five militant groups attending the meeting, unleashed a fusillade from their AK-47 assault rifles, pistols and carbines on a crowd of local people, killing one youth and critically injuring two others. The outrage was made politically worse by the fact that the organisation's "chief of staff", Douglas Devanantha, was involved in the action for part of the duration.

The incident has so much affected the residents of Tiruvalluvarpuram that there is a kind of xenophobia towards any outsider stalking its streets with people and shopkeepers clamming up when the topic is raised. But Tiruvalluvarpuram itself is a seedy area with a lumpen presence – with exposed drains cutting across its narrow lanes, drunkards commonly sauntering around and gamblers shuffling cards inside decrepit buildings.

The genesis of the awful bloodletting is buried in controversy, with several conflicting versions doing the rounds. According to one version, the EPRLF men staying in a house on the first street of Tiruvalluvarpuram used to hire out their motorbike to the local residents to keep good relations with them. On Deepavali day, however, they refused to oblige a drunken man. Piqued, the drunk returned with local rowdies to pick a quarrel with the EPRLF men, which rapidly escalated into the outrage of machine-gunning.

Another version is that some locals, in a Deepavali mood, tossed a few lighted crackers on the militants who answered with machine-gun fire. According to the City Police Commissioner, W. I. Davaram, four EPRLF boys, walking abreast on the street, were annoyed when a pedestrian dashed towards them and they beat him up. The mediators in the dispute also received blows and with tension building up, one of the militants sprinted up to his nearby house and began raking the locals with fire.

There is, however, a somewhat more objective, in fact eyewitness, account of the entire episode. It was around 2.15 p.m. when a neighbouring student, preparing for his examinations, was distracted by the noise "like that of powerful crackers" going off close by. As he peeped out of the window, expecting to see urchins setting off crackers, he was stunned. An EPRLF militant standing in front of his house was firing "blank rounds" in the air from his AK-47 rifle to scare away a small group trying to surge at him. He had a "supplier" at the side, feeding him with "magazines" of cartridges to be loaded into the rifles. What happened the next moment is something that the young student "will never forget in my life."

There were shouts of *vendaam, vendaam* ("no, no") and as he turned, he saw a local youth, Tirunavukkarasu, running with his arms raised and appealing to the militants to stop firing. The next moment, he slumped on the ground in a heap, receiving a murderous blast of bullets.

As the crowd swelled, more militants filed out of their house, armed with pistols, carbines and AK-47s. The "supplier" was there, relaying the magazines and the militants puncturing the air with a spray of cartridges. One bullet ricocheted and hit a man (in the crowd) dressed in white trousers and white shirt. As the terribly angered crowd managed to get hold of an autorickshaw and put the mortally wounded Harijan youth – with blood splattered all over his white clothes – into the vehicle, a militant fired at the autorickshaw driver. But the bullets went wild. In the melee, one of the EPRLF men quietly wheeled away on a bicycle.

In a few minutes, another EPRLF man arrived on the spot on a motorcycle and the crowd, which had now massed into about 150 persons, turned its anger on the bearded motorcycle rider and beat him up. They also picked a large glass jar from a nearby shop and threw it at his face. This turned out to be Douglas Devanantha, and how he handled the situation which had already gone out of control is a matter shrouded in much speculation and controversy even in the EPRLF ranks.

Sensing the mood of the crowd, the handful of militants bolted themselves inside their house and pock-marked the walls with a rapid burst of sustained gunfire, perhaps to fend off the crowd outside. But the crowd was pelting the house with "missiles", bricks and stones. It set fire to the "pandal" erected in front of the house, and from the vantage point let loose another fusillade all round.

Soon, a few constables arrived in a police van from the nearby Nungambakkam police station but they were understandably nervous about going inside the house. The crowd now vented its anger on the police van driver and rained blows on him. The militants finally surrendered to top police officials who soon arrived on the scene, but not before a last-ditch act of defiance. They refused to hand in their weapons, arguing that these belonged to their movement.

While the EPRLF's leadership in Madras demanded "an impartial inquiry" into the incident, it thought it fit to go to Delhi to convene a press conference to present its version. According to L. Ketheeswaran, its spokesman, "four EPRLF cadres were attacked by a group of people who converged on them from a shop and later had been reinforced by another group which came on the scene in an autorickshaw. The unprovoked attack was clearly planned and well-co-ordinated." By whom and why, neither Ketheeswaran nor K. Padmanabha, the EPRLF's secretary-general, was able to say. A few weeks earlier the EPRLF had convened a press conference in Madras to

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lash out at the Tamil Nadu police for "harassment" and to announce that it was closing down its publicity unit, the Eelam People's Information Centre, for a month as a token of protest. If the Government of India wanted it, the organisation was even prepared to get out of India "politically," announced one of its leading members in the press conference.

But what was surprising – and the silence proved ominous – was that the firing incident did not figure in the militants' meeting with the Chief Minister two days later, when they handed in their written responses to the Sri Lankan Government's proposals.

Unlike the previous meetings when all the groups met the Chief Minister together, this time there were separate meetings. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, represented by its leader V. Prabakaran and spokesman A. S. Balasingham, went in first and submitted their written response to the Chief Minister, who asked Food Minister S. Ramachandran to read it aloud. The Centre's representative, S. Balakrishnan, busied himself taking down the important points and intervening at times to explain them in Tamil to the Chief Minister. Then followed a round of lengthy discussions with the LTTE leaders. Next to troop in was the ENLF team consisting of representatives from the EROS, the TELO and the EPRLF, and finally, the PLOT leaders.

Not Hawkish

A notable feature of the LTTE's response was that its tone was not in the least hawkish. It did not take its stand on the high ground of Eelam. It clearly indicated it was prepared to pitch its negotiation position on the basis of the demand for a single Tamil unit comprising the North and the East. The LTTE, "having studied carefully the contents of the proposals", found the framework "inadequate, failing to meet the basic political aspirations of our people." Its core response was to define its concept of the Tamil homeland: "This homeland is a clearly identifiable, contiguous single region, composed of the Northern and the Eastern provinces." But the most revealing statement followed soon after. "We therefore insist that for any meaningful political settlement, the acceptance by the Sri Lankan Government of an indivisible, single region as the homeland of the Tamils is basic."

This was the key sentence, providing an insight into the LTTE's latest political thinking. It signalled the Government of India that the unit of devolution – as distinct from separation – was the key issue on which any political package would stand or fall.

Legitimate Fear

The LTTE's response also offered a reason why it was insisting on a single Tamil region as the unit of devolution: "The Tamils have a legitimate fear that once the North and the East are separated into two units under the proposed framework, the territorial basis that unifies the character and nature of their nationality is seriously undermined." In other words, the demand for the recognition of a single, indivisible Tamil homeland issued from the reality that the Tamils formed a distinct "nationality".

In fact, the LTTE's response was a substantive and carefully worked out critique of the proposals, covering the entire gamut of the package, speaking to the crucial points concerning law and order, land and land settlement, the reserved, concurrent and provincial lists and the President's untrammelled powers in declaring an emergency. According to the LTTE, "In matters relating to law and order, the framework offers overriding powers to the Centre." It found that the superimposition of the national police authority over the provincial police system and the sweeping powers of the IGP and the President have reduced "the provincial police system to a powerless institution without adequate authority to ensure the protection of the Tamil population." On the issue of land and land settlement, the Centre "has absolute power" in setting up inter-provincial irrigation and land development projects and "the proposals fail to secure the territorial integrity of the Tamil homeland from encroachment and annexation by the Central Government".

Presidents Limitless Powers

It also found that the legislative powers accorded to the provincial council had become "meaningless since Parliament has overriding legislative powers even in subjects falling within the sphere of provinces." The President has "limitless emergency powers" under which he can arbitrarily dissolve the provincial councils. The response touched on State violence against the Tamils, the massive militarisation programme of the Sri Lankan Government and the rapid erection of army camps in the Tamil areas. Significantly, it concluded on the note of reiterating its whole-hearted support to the Government of India and the Tamil Nadu Government in their efforts "to find a lasting solution that would guarantee the liberty, dignity and security of our people."

By contrast, the ENLF's written response began as a high-flying note. "We totally reject the very premise on which the proposals are based", namely the maintenance of the unitary and non-secular character of the Sri Lankan Constitution, the non-acceptance of the Tamils as a distinct nationality, and the negation of the concept of the Tamil homeland. The ENLF's response also treaded on extra-territorial turf. It declared that "the recognition of the inalienable right of self-determination of both the Tamil and Sinhala nationalities is an absolute pre-condition for bargaining about genuine peace on the island." Besides, the proposals "seek to undermine the national and territorial identity of the Eelam people by excluding the plantation Tamils and the areas inhabited and developed by them for generations from all discussions on the nationality problem."

It added for good measure: "Although the above reasons are sufficient to reject outright the proposals emanating from the JR-TULF talks, we feel obliged to give our comment on certain specific aspects of the proposals." The aspects include the "overriding powers of the President over the proposed provincial structure," the concurrent list "overloaded with subjects which should ordinarily and strictly fall under the category of the provincial list" and the "usurping" of powers in the sensitive subject of land settlement.

The ENLF's hurriedly prepared response perhaps mirrored the trauma that one of its affiliaties – the EPRLF – underwent just two days earlier. In the PLOT's case, it simply "borrowed" the ENLF's response, promptly deleted the portion regarding the plantation Tamils and proffered it to the Chief Minister as its own. The ENLF was not pleased with the PLOT's move.

According to V. Balakumar, leader of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation (EROS), his organisation's main objection was to the unitary character of the Sri Lankan Constitution. He refused to buy the stance that it was impossible to change the unitary nature of the Constitution because this needed a referendum. "We know that in Sri Lankan history, they have twice fully changed the Constitution. They drafted two new Constitutions in 1972 and 1978."

Makes Us Slaves

He called the Constitution "a disgrace to the Tamil people. It makes us slaves." Besides, the proposals state that "Buddhism is going to be the State religion for ever. Sinhala will be the official language for ever. The Sinhala national anthem and the Sinhala national flag are going to be there. They will not change them. This means they are not ready to treat us as equal human beings." According to Balakumar, this was why the ENLF has emphasised its four cardinal principles in its response. (The four principles include the recognition of the Tamils as a distinct nationality, recognition of their right to their homeland and self-determination and the grant of citizenship to all plantation Tamils and restoration of their democratic rights).

With the militants refusing to buy the proposals, the question that naturally arose was: what was going to happen next?

The answer, of very far-reaching political and emotional significance, was not slow in coming – and when it did, it severely shook up the equations in a very complicated and messy picture.

T. S. Subramanian

(Courtesy of Frontline, 15–28 November, 1986)

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TAMIL EELAM—ILLUSIONS OF INDIAN HELP DISPELLED

The comparative lull on the negotiating front in late September and October saw an escalation of military activity in the Tamil-dominated Eastern and Northern provinces of Sri Lanka. While it is still a tug-of-war between the security forces and the militants in the East, the North is virtually under the control of the LTTE. D. B. S. JEYARAJ reports from Jaffna and Colombo.*

DAWK was the description given to Henry Kissinger in the United States when he initiated the Paris peace talks while his country was continuously bombing Vietnam. The term, derived from a combination of dove and hawk, seems rather appropriate to describe the Sri Lankan Government's approach to a negotiated settlement on the national question too. For those in charge of defence and security have constantly defended their military strategy by claiming that it was being done to (a) scale down the separatist violence (b) to show the Eelamists that they cannot win, and (c) to enable the Government to negotiate from a position of military strength. The final "goal" is always "peace".

The delusion of a military victory has been the bane of the Sri Lankan political establishment in the past. The harsh effect of this approach is borne by the Tamil-speaking people. The reality in the past weeks has been that of "battlehawks" hovering in the skies over the Northern and Eastern Provinces while "peacedoves" cooed in New Delhi, Madras and Colombo. Peace and a negotiated settlement was emphasised in August and early September. But in the past few weeks the scene has shifted to the theatre of war – the Tamil areas in general and the Eastern Province in particular.

The Eastern Province of Sri Lanka – comprising the districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai, with Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese making up 42 per cent, 32 per cent and 26 per cent of the population respectively (1981 census) – has been the crucially important factor in the ethnic crisis. During the period of G. Parthasarathy's shuttle diplomacy in 1983, the question of the East and the North being merged together went unanswered. The All-Party Conference of 1984 saw vehement opposition to the North-East regional council. The Thimpu talks in 1985 collapsed as the Sri Lankan Government rejected the integrity of the traditional Tamil homeland (N & E) concept. The Chidambaram mission too was confronted with the same North-East linkage issue. The recent statement in Madras by the Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, J. N. Dixit, that the North-East linkage was the only unresolved issue shows that despite three years of protracted struggle and negotiations, the Eastern Province remains the vitally determining factor.

(This assessment was written before the police swoop on the militants in Tamil Nadu, with reactions to this in Sri Lanka)

Comparative Lull

In that context the comparative lull on the negotiating front during late September and October saw an escalation of military activity noticeably in the East. While negotiators were trying perhaps to close the gap on linkage, both the armed forces and the militants were fighting to take effective control of the ground in a physical sense. With the appointment of a boundaries commission in the air, the actual control of an area would be a stark reality that could not be ignored by any redemarcator. The "Muslim factor", unlike earlier instances, was a neutral element in this essentially Sinhala (State)-Tamil (guerilla) confrontation.

Naturally Trincomalee was of primary importance. The trunk road from Trincomalee to Colombo, the Nilaweli and Sambaltivu zones, the strip of land along Morawewa and pockets in Trincomalee town were under Tamil militant control. The areas adjacent to security installations were spheres of state influence. Apart from the Muslim-dominated areas, the rest was a sort of No Man's Land – a veritable relic of a scorched earth policy. The strip of land in Morawewa was the corridor ensuring passage between the North and the East. Incidentally, the area known as Morawewa in Sinhala was Mudalikkulam in Tamil prior to Sinhala colonisation.

A massive operation deploying 2,000 to 3,000 security personnel was launched in Sambaltivu to comb out the Tamil militants. According to reports, the militants moved away like fish in the ocean. The Tamil people were however rounded up and re-located temporarily under armed guard and several houses were destroyed or damaged. Hundreds of women and children became temporary refugees. The people were allowed to go back to their homes in phased-out intervals. The situation is now virtually back to square one. The armed forces demonstrated their ability to discharge an operation of this nature with a minimum loss of life instead of engaging in an orgy of killing as in the past. However, the operation also demonstrated the futility of military exercises against guerillas who have the sympathy and support of the people.

Dotted with Army Camps

The landscape of Batticaloa is dotted with security camps. The burden of counter-insurgency operations in the East is borne by a newly created crack police commando unit, the Special Task Force (STF). Batticaloa became a keenly contested arena as both sides struggled for supremacy.

The Batticaloa airport was attacked by militants and a helicopter damaged. Several bridges and culverts were destroyed and roads were landmined to restrict troop movements. For the first time in the East, the Tigers used the car bomb technique resulting in some policemen being killed. Citizens' Committee sources alleged that the police ran amok killing 13 civilians. The Tamils called for a hartal. The 17-year-old son of a Tamil police officer was abducted and killed. C. Rajadurai and K. W. Devanayagam, both Cabinet Ministers representing the Eastern Province constituencies of Batticaloa and Kalkudah respectively, flew in and out of the East under tight security to attend official functions. Several police patrols fell victim to militant landmines during this period.

The security forces counterattacked by cordoning off villages and rounding up all the youth. Some were released while others languish in custody still. When Muslim fishermen were assaulted in Valaichinai, the Muslims staged a hartal in protest. Both Tamils and Muslims cooperated with each other in hartals which proved to be resounding successes. But the security forces also improved their position by moving on foot into areas considered unassailable Tamil fortresses.

The Batticaloa lagoon bisects certain areas of the district into two strips parallel to the coastline. The people call the area to the east "Eluvankarai" (shore of the rising sky) and the land to the west "Paduvankarai" (shore of the setting sky). Paduvankarai is a homogeneous Tamil area affording great mobility and protection to the militants. The security forces have succeeded in establishing checkpoint camps at places where ferries ply across the lagoon. A few camps have been set up in the Paduvankarai strip itself. On the other hand, the security personnel movements on the ground are being restricted gradually to the major roads in other areas.

Peace and War

An indication of the tense situation in Batticaloa could be gauged by what occurred on October 27, World Peace Day. The State and the militants were observing a 24-hour truce in deference to the call by the Pope. The Batticaloa Citizens' Committee sent a telegram that noon to the Papal Nuncio in Colombo that the truce had been violated by security men who shot and injured S. Sooriakumar (24) as he was fishing in the lagoon. Later security forces surrounded the hospital to arrest the injured man on the charge of being a 'Tiger'. The intervention of the Citizens' Committee saw the injured man remaining in hospital with the guarantee that he would report to the authorities after recovery. Even Deepavali, the festival of Tamil Hindus, was a "black" event to the residents of the district. A landmine attack on Deepavali-eve at Porativu saw an aerial attack on the area. The Citizens' Committee wired to J.R. Jayawardene saying that four houses were damaged; 1,500 had evacuated their homes. Another 50 including goldsmiths from Colombo who had come home for the festival were arrested.

Another major operation was on. About 500 people were arrested on Deepavali-eve and Deepavali day from four villages in Batticaloa-West. They were taken to a

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camp at Manalpiddi. Batticaloa citizens charged that the civilians were being held as hostages to ensure immunity against a militant attack.

On Deepavali day, security men surrounded Kokkatticholai from four directions. Setting up four temporary camps on all sides, they commenced search operations. About 10,000 people were reported to have fled to the nearby jungles. A Government official and a woman were killed. Three houses were burnt and 150 were arrested at Mahiladitivu. Security forces were reported to be venturing further interior where the paddy fields are.

The Liberation Tigers claimed credit for three landmine attacks at three places before, during and after Deepavali. The EROS and the LTTE are the most active groups in the East. The Amparai district, predominantly Muslim and Sinhala, has been free of major violence for some time now.

Difference

The qualitative situation in the North is different from that of the East. The peninsula is virtually under the "control" of the militants with the army being confined to camps. Troop movement is extremely restricted in Killinochi and Mullaitivu districts, and the situation is a little better for the army in Mannar and Vavuniya districts. The militants seem to be on the ascendency in the North. Colombo apparently controls only the skies and the seas of the North. Its weakness on the ground is illustrated by the recent troop movements between Killinochi and Vavuniya along the Jaffna-Kandy highway, the main trunk road. Despite the distance covered being approximately 96 km and the camps of Kokuvil, Mankulam and Omantai being transit points, the forces resorted to commandeering civilian vehicles. Vehicles carrying civilians such as buses were forced to join the military convoy in what seemed an attempt to prevent the militants from attacking the troops.

The strength of the militants and their bonds with the people prevent the security forces from establishing supremacy. A full-scale bid to venture out would be resisted by the militants. Obviously such a struggle would result in heavy loss of life to both sides. Even if the forces were to win in such an assault, the victory would be pyrrhic as, faced with an alienated hostile population, the troops would have no choice but to withdraw to the comparative safety of camp. More important, such operations would also cause great loss to civilian life, limb and property. In that event, international opinion and Indian pressure would react adversely against Sri Lanka. The situation is virtually a stalemate with neither side being able to dislodge the other without the aid of an external factor that would weaken or strengthen the militants. The inability of the State to exercise its power effectively has caused a vacuum. That is now being filled as rapidly as possible by the militants, of whom the Tigers lead the field.

LTTE Asserts

The most significant development in the recent past has been the assertion of power in the North by the strongest militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). After decimating the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) in April-May, the LTTE with the limited support of the EPRLF and the PLOT withstood 'Operation Short Shrift', an air-sea-land assault on the peninsula for five days. Thereafter the Tigers have embarked on a systematic programme to set up a parallel civil administration in Jaffna. They have imposed different taxes and levies on income business turnover, a toll vehicle excise, etc. They have set up a TV station which telecasts a popular programme on weekends. They have begun to issue licences to vehicles, motorists, radio and TV owners and business establishments. They are setting up police posts to maintain internal law and order. They run a number of industries, shops and even educational institutions. They have set up village-level tribunals to arbitrate legal disputes.

A cultural council has been set up to foster, preserve and regulate the arts, crafts and literature. A children's zoo has been opened, and sanitary standards and a price control scheme are being enforced. There are also blackboards at all important junctions. The boards carry news bulletins about the events of the day with a particular emphasis on State-militant clashes since the State media have no credibility here. The news on boards, updated in the morning and evening, are lapped up eagerly. Next to these boards are boxes in which one could drop suggestions, complaints or requests. Militant training schools and factories producing arms and ammunition are also run by the Tigers. First aid posts and an economic planning centre have also been set up.

Other groups like the EPRLF have issued postage stamps and are attempting to run a parallel post office. Since the attempt is to utilise the existing State postal services, there is some confusion. The PLOT has an ambulance service, protective bunkers and so on. The EROS maintains a low profile and is busy organising at the grassroots level.

The LTTE has announced that it will set up an Eelam Secretariat in January 1987 to run the civil administration. It would coordinate and consolidate all civil administrative functions run by it under a unified whole. The LTTE maintains that the idea of the Secretariat is not connected to the scheme of devolution envisaged by India or to a unilateral declaration of independence.

PLOT Malfunctioning

Another important development has been the malfunctioning of the PLOT in the North. The Tigers of the Wanni area confiscated all arms and vehicles belonging to the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam after a private lorry, owned by a Muslim and carrying provisions, was allegedly hijacked by the PLOT. After a high-level meeting with the other organisations' representatives, the LTTE issued a warning that severe action would be taken against the PLOT if it "victimised" any Muslim. The PLOT, fearing a replay of the TELO's plight, announced that it was "suspending" all operations for some time. It handed over its arsenals, bunkers and vehicles to the LTTE. This was tantamount to surrendering to an ultimatum issued by the LTTE. Both the EPRLF and the EROS issued statements condemning the LTTE action.

The manoeuvres among the militant groups and the State's response may cause a change of atmosphere.

In the final analysis what matters is the people's will. The success of the current negotiating process, the relations among the organisations, the power of the organisations, or the State – everything depends ultimately on the people. The mood of the Tamil people in the North and the East has been marked by continuity as well as change. The element of continuity is inherent in the nature of the Tamil struggle for justice and equality. It has displayed a tenacity from pre-independence times until now – long before violent modes were adopted. The stabilising factor of continuity will now allow the Tamils to accept anything short of a genuine settlement that would truly meet their legitimate aspirations. This commonality of feeling is prevalent among all sections of the people. While yearning for peace, they will not accept it without honour. An acceptable settlement would be one that is satisfactory in terms of unit and substance. After long years of suffering oppression and bearing the brunt of a scorched earth policy, the Tamils do not seem in a mood to accept anything short of a Tamil linguistic province. The early creation of such a unit seems to be the only chance of activating the dormant peace constituency. If the 1983 violence unified Tamils and created a broader Tamil identity, the goal of a linguistic unit with quasi-federal powers seems something that reinforces that collective identity.

Change in Mood

The change in the Tamil mood is essentially caused by a reactive effect. The mood is variable according to time and space and has different degrees of intensity. This fluctuation in mood is caused by various events and processes. An ideal example would be the India-inspired peace talks. The progress of peace is monitored keenly and results in several questions, both negative and positive, in the public mind. "A settlement seems to be imminent", "New Delhi has now understood our problem", "J.R. seems ready to settle now?", "Will the boys reject it?", "Will India betray us?", "Will India crush the boys?", "Can we trust the Government?", are some of these. The collective mood becomes synchronised with the talking process and varies in accordance with the perception of every move, counter-move, twist or turn.

The mood is also subjective to events such as the State's repressive activities – the shelling, the strafing, the bombing, the mass arrests and the threats issued by politicos; the inter-group rivalry of the militants; the obnoxious behaviour of certain militant groups; hardships such as the lack of transport, fuel, the high cost of living caused by the escalation of the conflict, and so on. A pessimistic mood however does not translate itself into support for the State as the fluctuating change does not obliterate the theme of basic continuity.

The sense of buoyant optimism that prevailed during Indira Gandhi's tenure of office began to resurface among the Tamil people. A minor cause for this feeling was the appointment of P. Chidambaram as negotiator; the major cause is the perception that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, after two years in office, has become more

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SRI LANKA: A Review of the Developments Since July 1983

THE HUMAN RIGHTS FACTOR IN THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

Continued from last issue

MONITORING COMMITTEE

Consequent to this ceasefire, talks were held in Thimpu in Bhutan from 18th July to 13th August, 1985. The second round of talks at Thimpu took place in September 1985 and there was a complete breakdown of the talks; this resulted in the deportation of some of the spokesmen for the militants by the Indian Government (this was later withdrawn). It was in this atmosphere that a Committee to monitor the cessation of hostilities evidently agreed to by both parties as part of the cease-fire agreement started functioning on 16.10.85; the jurisdiction of this committee even covered reporting of conditions in prisons and detention camps. Predictably enough, the C.M.C.H. could not work for a long time, but its efforts brought to light the enormity of the problems such a process had to confront. With the resignation of the two Tamil members recommended for appointment to that Committee by the militants over an incident in Jaffna in which helicopter shooting had taken place at the time the Committee visited Jaffna, the Committee effectively ceased to function.

Perhaps the most staggering of all the post-1983 state action is the beginning of the attacks from the air – first it was explosives thrown from helicopters, later shooting from helicopters and finally full scale bombing. Jaffna was first bombed on 20.2.86 at Thavady. With this air attack, the lines that existed between the militants and the people began to disappear fast and there arose a situation that without the militants, it would be difficult for the people to save themselves. Attacks continue even now and the most recent one took place a week ago in Sambaltivu in the Trincomalee District. Bombings, it is claimed, are undertaken to clear up the areas of the militants. However, in terms of casualties, virtually all had been civilians.

All these have developed a sense of despondency among the people about the credibility of any move towards a solution. When there was a ceasefire, there were no talks; and now when there are talks, there is no ceasefire. To the average Tamil this presents an air of unreality and it is this feeling that constitutes the psychological base for the current no-go state in the attempts to bring about a solution.

IV

It is important now for us to describe the human rights violations that took place amidst the actions mentioned earlier. Amnesty International Report (April 1986) re-affirming its continued position to the refoulement of the Tamils to Sri Lanka (these are refugees who had migrated to western countries) said: – "If returned, Tamil civilians not involved in combat would be at grave risk of becoming victims of human rights violations. These include –

(a) Arbitrary killings by members of the Security Forces as reprisal for the killing of their own men or of members of the Sinhala community;

(b) "Disappearance" of people allegedly arrested by Security Force personnel;

(c) Arbitrary arrest and detention have been long-term and in-communicado;

(d) Ill-treatment and torture after arrest.

Amnesty International Reports on these situations are adequate evidence for the reality of these. They are:–

(1) Sri Lanka – Some recent reports of extra-judicial killings – September 1985 to March 1986 – ASA 37/3/86.

(2) Sri Lanka – Disappearances – ASA 37/8/86 – First published – September 1986.

(3) File on "Torture" – Amnesty International Report No. 10 – October 1985.

On torture, this is what the AI File on "torture" has to say:

"Torture occurs in military and police camps and in police stations, but is rarely reported from prisons. It is used to extort "confessions" or to obtain information. It is widely used by the army and police including the Criminal Investigating Department and the Special Task Force."

"Army camps in the north where former detenues alleged they were tortured included Vavuniya, Palaly, Elephant Pass, Pt. Pedro, Keerimalai, Thallady and Gurunagar. There have also been allegations of torture in the recently established camps of the Police Special Task Force at Kallady and Kallaru in the Eastern Province and one at the Boosa and Tangalle camps in the South".

DISAPPEARANCES

As for "disappearances", it has been mostly in the Eastern Province. The situation has been such that the Amnesty International has recommended that the Sri Lankan Government initiates speedy and impartial investigations to clarify the whereabouts of the people reported to have disappeared in Sri Lanka and inform their relatives or their findings forthwith. It has also been suggested that the Government establishes an independent Commission to investigate all cases of disappearance in Sri Lanka.

Commenting on the data relating to "disappearances", the Amnesty International report says:

"That except one Sinhalese, all other disappeared people are Tamils; many of the disappeared are farmers, labourers and fishermen who are from poor families. A substantial number are students and civil servants and one is a Roman Catholic Priest".

Most allegations of "disappearance" cited the Army and the Special Task Force, but some also cited the Navy and the Police. In a few incidents, the home guards are allegedly responsible. It is important to mention these to emphasis the fact of dislocation and disruption caused to civil life in these areas. The psychological impact of all these state actions is creating an almost irredeemable situation in ethnic relations.

The state forces are non-Tamil (in the areas of operation) and often consider themselves Sinhala soldiers with a mission in a vanquished territory. On the Sinhala side the impression about the Tamil militant is that he is bent on eradicating everything Sinhala. It is this psychological divide which is now the most serious problem in Sinhala-Tamil relations.

by Prof. K. SIVATHAMBY
University of Jaffna

V

PROBLEM OF REFUGEES

The question of safety and security in the various areas of the Tamil districts has led to the refugee problem. Without minimising in any sense the significance of the refugees going out of Sri Lanka, the problem of refugees within the island needs analysis, because it is the intensity of this problem that is causing a lot of hardships for many poor Tamil people.

Tamil refugees could be classified into two major groups:

(a) Inter-district refugees – These are Tamil families which have been dislocated from the districts where they have been living and are now seeking security and shelter in other Tamil districts; and

(b) Intra-district refugees – These are persons and families having to leave their homes due to proximity to Army Camps and/or to the sea coast (fishing is banned) and are seeking shelter and security in safer areas within the same district.

Refugee Situation as on 30.9.86

District	No. of Camps	No. of Families	No. of Persons
Trincomalee	23	5,780	28,746
Batticaloa	5	2,301	10,722
Mullaitivu	8	2,420	10,889
Vavuniya	6	727	3.127
Mannar	2	233	1.047
Kilinochchi	5	280	1,397
Kilinochchi (outside camps)	–	5,300	26,500
Jaffna	11	1.201	5,301
Jaffna (outside camps)	–	–	14,699
Total:	60	18,242	102,428

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There is a tendency on the part of the Tamil to move towards safer places. The situation in the Tamil areas has been further worsened because of the abandonment of the development plans that were formulated by the Government for these areas. It is said that most of the development projects had to be given up because of problems in monitoring. However, with increased pressure on land due to refugee movement towards the north, the problem is becoming more acute. There is State assistance provided in the form of dry rations for particular periods of time, but quite often this is stopped after some time. At that point of time, it becomes extremely difficult for the people to live in the new areas. There has also been the problem of sending refugee children to schools. The schools available in the areas are not equipped to absorb these children and classes have to be run on a voluntary basis for these children and the teachers are quite often school leavers themselves.

There is a fear of rise in the rate of illiteracy.

VI

CITIZENS' COMMITTEES

How has the Tamil community been able to cope with those disruptions in its socio-economic life and yet manage to establish contact with the authorities, to report to them their grievances and also to obtain relief?

The formation of the Citizens' Committee was the answer to this need. With:

(a) the absence of representation at the local and national levels;

(b) the increasing severity of the military and police operations causing great loss to life and damage to property of innocent civilians; and

(c) the breakdown of the civil administration, especially the network of the welfare services,

there arose an immediate need for the more articulate citizens of the community to group themselves together without delay to seek redress for damage done and inconvenience caused to their fellow community members and to ensure the continuity of life in the community.

Thus a "crisis situation" in a particular area (village or town) creates the need for the formation of a Citizens' Committee. This is done so as to have a means of establishing contact with:

(a) the military authorities functioning within the areas; and

(b) the civil authorities to ensure the continuity of life.

The first of these Citizens' Committees rose up in the town of Jaffna in 1982 when M.P.s were taken into protective custody and the library, the market and several other buildings were burnt. At the time of its formation, it went to the extent of supporting the call of the Army to join them in patrol duty. Then as crises arose in the various towns and villages, Citizens' Committees began to be formed at those levels. Thus Citizens' Committees arose in Valvettiturai, Pt. Pedro, Karaveddy, Kondavil, Mathagal, Chulipuram, etc.

With the rise of such Committees in various villages and towns performing almost the same functions – i.e. contacting the military authorities, preparing affidavits, making representations to the Government Agent, there arose the need to co-ordinate the work of these Committees.

CO-ORDINATION

Thus a Co-ordinating Committee was formed and a Convenor and a Chairman elected. Mr. R. Balasubramaniam, Secretary, Jaffna Citizens' Committee, was elected the Co-ordinator and the present writer, was elected the Chairman.

With the same situation developing in other Tamil districts (as in Mannar, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee etc.,) it was thought useful to co-ordinate the work to make it easy for joint representations and for requests for redress.

The Citizens' Committees have been non-political organisations. They are, basically, groups of citizens, combined together as an interim body performing an emergency social function of contacting the military authorities and the civil administration for immediate ameliorative measures.

These do not have elaborate constitutional framework or constitutional structures. They are voluntary organisations. With the re-activation of the civil administration and its network of welfare activities and the efforts to re-establish the channels of political communication, the Citizens' Committees would cease to have any effective role.

NO POLITICAL ROLE

These Citizens' Committees have no political function to perform.

The Citizens' Committee Movement urges the need for a permanent political solution, but reiterates that it has to be achieved and ensured through the systems of political communication available and necessary for that task. The Citizens' Committees shall not play any political role; nor are these intended for such purpose.

Even so Citizens' Committees began to loom large in the socially and politically decimated life of the Sri Lankan Tamils and to some extent in the political corridors of Colombo to which they were the only "complainants" from the Tamils then available. Soon the Citizens' Committees also became the most reliable channels of information for the activities of the Army in the Tamil regions. This made them attractive to foreign-media correspondents and quite soon the Government found itself in an embarrassing position because of the reliable information that was being given by the Citizens' Committees. Looking at the rise of this Movement, 1985 constitutes its highest water-mark. It was in this year that they met the President J. R. Jayawardene and represented matters to him.

The credibility of the Citizens' Committees with the militants was also fairly high, as seen in their recommendations for appointment to the Cease-fire Monitoring Committee – both Mr. K. Sivapalan and Mr. K. Sivathamby were from Citizens' Committee. However, these developments quickly brought about a situation when the Government was not happy in allowing the Citizens' Committee to continue as the channel of communication for the people, especially after the breakdown of the Thimpu talks.

With the changed conditions in the military and political situations, the importance of the Citizens' Committee has now started to wane. The military situation has become so tense and the determination on the part of the State is so great that very often they do not encourage contact with civilians. This is the situation at local levels. It is now not possible for any civilian organisation to get in touch with the military authorities, even through civil officers. The war in the Tamil areas has become total, state with its army on one side and the people and the militants on the other.

The people are now getting used to the disrupted civil life and are trying to work out institutional apparatus to see them through these troubled times. The Citizens' Committee within its limited role of presenting the difficulties of the people to the civil and military authorities, is only one of its kind. There are equally urgent problems like settlement of disputes among the people, looking into local needs of community management, and maintaining the continuity of the essential services of the community. For these there is the necessity for a different type of community leadership which, in broad terms, the Citizens' Committees cannot provide. With the increasing social presence of the militants in the villages, the role of the local organisation will be to concentrate more and more on social work leaving defence and political matters in their hands. That brings us to the question of increasing socialisation of militants with the people.

VII

MILITANTS BECOME A POLITICAL FORCE

The militants' movements are proscribed by law and actions taken by the Government against them and the activities the militants indulge in make them necessarily militaristic. Militarism has become the raison d'etre of their existence for they are now guerilla fighters openly fighting against the State. The more militaristic the group is, the more effective they are in terms of performing their vital function of defending the people and advancing their cause. Thus a high degree of militarism has been the keynote of the organisational upkeep of the militant movements.

With the people becoming increasingly dependent on them, the militants are now becoming a more-open political force with clear-cut political targets.

It is now an established fact that socially and institutionally, they are establishing themselves as spokesmen of the community – a position which has come to them from the TULF. It is not only the socio-political needs that are making the militant groups become more and more socio-politically integrated. More importantly and perhaps more crucially it is the socio-liberationist character that is making them more and more integrated in the social life of the people. It should be understood that the Sri Lankan crisis is at one level of cognizance a National Question, at another level it is one of social radicalism-revolt which is calling into question some of the hitherto unquestioned ideological foundations of the Sri Lankan Tamil Society. It should be noted that the Sri Lankan Tamil youths, especially those from the northern part of the country, have a tradition of non-conformist idealist struggle. The first political struggle was started by the Youth Congress in the period 1929–1932. It was a movement of national-minded youth fighting for nationalism and independence

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inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and in its idealistic fervour, had rejected the fractional autonomy that the Donoughmore Commission recommended. It organised a boycott of the first Elections to the State Council. The movement was not a success.

The present Youth Movement started in the early 70s primarily as a result of the denial of higher education to competent Tamil students. At the start it was essentially a movement of pre-university students and some idealistic youth of the day. In its beginnings the movement opposed those opportunist-Tamils who collaborated with the Government of the day. The militants at the early stages did not oppose the TULF; the situation changed in 1977 when the TULF became the official opposition party and was expressing its keenness for parliamentary methods of achieving Tamil Eelam. The political rift came in 1982 when the TULF decided to accept DDCs. The continuous Army attacks and State surveillance compelled the militants to base their activities across the ocean in Tamilnadu. There was a real escalation of actions against the State Forces. As guerilla fighters, they started fighting the state forces. With the ceasefire of 1985, they have become a political force, and with the current round of talks, they are almost an open political force. It is important to note that all the Tamil militant youth movements, even though they have functioned primarily as anti-Sinhala opposition groups, have equally a vision of social change. All the groups speak in marxist terminologies, some of them more pronounced than the rest. It has now become quite clear that they are challenging very many of the established norms of Tamil society. With escalating air attacks, their integration with the masses is increasingly seen. With the collapse of the state welfare institutions at grass root levels and with the security forces taking a hostile attitude towards all community based activities, the mantle is now falling on the shoulders of the militant groups to organise themselves at the grass root levels for community development. This in certain areas has brought out the internal social contradictions of the community. In short, they have now become an important socio-political force and they have also clearly indicated that once their fight against State oppression is over, they will leave no stone unturned towards their goal for social egalitarianism.

VIII

THE TAMIL DEMANDS

The political solution that is being negotiated should take into account all these realities. A joint statement issued by the militants at the conclusion of the Thimpu I Talks, has summarised in unambiguous terms, the demand of the Sri Lankan Tamils:

(1) Recognition of Tamils as a distinct nationality;

(2) Guarantee of the territorial integrity of the Tamil homeland;

(3) Recognition of the right to self-determination;

(4) Right to full citizenship of the plantation Tamils.

The government of Sri Lanka also has moved from the position of District Councils to Provincial Councils. Without going into details and technicalities of the present proposals, it could be said that the latest proposals also refuse to recognise the fact that what the government faces is a special problem that has arisen in the Tamil-speaking areas of Sri Lanka and it has to be solved at that level. Provincial Councils are going to be imposed on areas which do not want them. The demand for political power for self-management is a political problem confronted by the Government in the Tamil areas and not in other areas. What the Tamils demand is a special constitutional arrangement in which their safety as persons and security and continuity as an ethnic group are maintained. That constitutional arrangement might range from a type of federalism to separatism that is demanded by the militants.

STRUCTURE OF SETTLEMENT

The crucial need therefore is to recognise the Tamils as constituting one political unit in this country; that unit would primarily have a territorial dimension with definite geographically contiguous areas of habitation and collective demographic dimension with all Tamils, wherever they live in the island, deemed to be considered as belonging to the Tamil Unit. Unless this is realised, there is no possibility of a negotiated settlement.

Historical fears and opportunistic party politics stand in the way of the Sinhalese to understand that the Tamils of Sri Lanka are as much part and parcel of the political, social and cultural landscape and heritage of the country, and therefore should be considered as a distinct ethnic group with a traditional homeland of its own within the island, and be given equality of treatment and be assured of the absence of discrimination at all levels. This relates to the political structure of the settlement.

But more important is that the people should believe that there is an earnest and very sincere attempt being made to solve this problem. The post-1983 events described in this Paper have resulted in the absence of any trust and faith in those wielding power to implement what has been agreed upon. The major problem is that when the Tamil people opted for much less than what is being now offered, the bureaucracy and the Government did not want to implement it in the spirit of the agreement. What is the guarantee now for the implementation of a scheme in which more things are promised? This therefore, is also a question of political trust. Any proposal to settle the ethnic issue should spell out how it would be implemented, who would supervise it and with what authority? This evidently increases the importance of the role of India in settling this problem.

There is, finally, the manner in which the intended solution is being canvassed at the level of the Sinhala masses. Government spokesmen are at pains to show to the Sinhala masses that what is being given to the Tamils is really nothing much. This makes the Tamils feel suspicious of what is being offered. Above all, it is also emerging as a quation of the self respect of the community as a whole. "Why is it that the government is not telling the Sinhala people that they are giving the Tamils what they need and deserve?" Should one accept a solution that is being served under the counter? This is a national problem and should be solved at that level.

Concluded

ENLF RESPONSE

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oppressed as a distinct nationality (unlike the Sinhala people). The recognition of the inalienable right of self-determination of both the Tamil and Sinhala nationalities is an absolute pre-condition for bargaining about genuine peace in the island. In practical terms there must be the fusion of a broad Tamil and Sinhala consensus which is necessary to convince the oppressed Tamil nationality that there is scope for co-existence within a united Sri Lanka.

(c) the negation of the concept and reality of a Tamil homeland. All the proposals placed by the Sri Lankan Government have sought to bifurcate our homeland by treating the Northern and Eastern provinces as two distinct entities. They also seek to undermine the national and territorial identity of the Eelam people by excluding the plantation Tamils and the areas inhabited and developed by them for generations from all discussions on the nationality problem. The refusal to accept integration of the Tamil-speaking provinces into a single economic unit undermines its economic viability and scope for efficient allocation of resources.

In view of the above a fundamental rethinking is necessary from the side of the Sri Lankan Government. If done nationally and logically it would unavoidably lead to the acceptance of the four basic demands put forward by the Tamil delegation present at the Thimpu conference.

2.2 *Although the above reasons are sufficient to reject outright the proposals emanating from the J.R.-TULF talks, we feel obliged to give our comment on certain specific aspects of the proposals. We do this in deference to the request of the Government of India and in appreciation of its role as a mediator to a highly complex problem. We, however, wish to emphasise that our comments given below are bound to be redundant in the context of our stated position in 1.1.*

The proposals before us, formulated on the basis of the principles of devolution of power within the scope and extent of the existing unitary Constitution of Sri Lanka and with the present administrative provinces as the basic units of devolution, provide for the overriding powers of the President over the proposed provincial political structure. Together with the concurrent list, overloaded with subjects which should ordinarily and strictly fall under the category of the provincial list, while in vital areas, like law and order, every opportunity offered to the Central Government to infringe on and make inroads into the specified scope of the provinces, from recruitment to deployment, and in another equally significant and sensitive subject of land settlement, there is an obvious attempt to usurp the essence of the powers involved, leaving the remnants to the provinces, leading to an inevitable situation where the very principle of devolution is watered through the whole process to the point of saturation, making it a mockery if not a nullity.

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Effects of Conflict on Economy in Northern Sri Lanka

This is the final part of the study undertaken by Dr. Paul Seabright in Northern Sri Lanka during the latter half of 1985. Dr. Seabright is presently attached to Churchill College, Cambridge

Continued from last issue

Northern and Eastern Provinces: A Coming Food Crisis?

While I do not have detailed information on economic conditions elsewhere in the North and East of Sri Lanka, information is available that can be used to give a brief general picture. First of all, violence against all three communities has continued at a much higher level than in Jaffna. Documentation by citizens' committees and non-governmental organisations suggests that killings of Tamils by security forces have been running at a rate of between one hundred and three hundred per month since August 1985; how many of these have been combatants is unclear, but from age and sex details it is clearly a minority. Killings of members of the other communities are less fully documented (not through negligence but because the growth of independent documentation has begun in the Tamil-dominated areas where the violence was initially highest and the official press coverage absent). But it is clear from refugee figures that all three communities have suffered seriously: in Trincomalee district, where the initial populations of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese were roughly equal, of some 31,000 refugees in camps in early November 1985, approximately 14,000 were Tamils, 11,000 Sinhalese and 6,000 Muslim.

Reports from the Eastern province indicate that what links there have been (including trade links) between villages of different communities have been abruptly broken: Muslim traders no longer move into Tamil villages as before, nor vice versa. But dwarfing these considerations of local linkages is the fact of a large-scale displacement of population in the two provinces. Calculations based on numbers of refugees in camps, plus those who have crossed to neighbouring districts and those who are staying with relatives and receiving government dry rations, indicate that just over one-third of the population of Vavuniya and Trincomalee districts is currently displaced.

This does not include those who have left the country (e.g. to India). And importantly, it does not include those who have been temporarily displaced from their homes but have returned, and who may have suffered major disruption of their activities. When the scale of this displacement is contemplated it is unsurprising to learn that in these two provinces the area of paddy cultivation is approximately 10 per cent of normal, and that in the Northern and Eastern provinces as a whole the production of paddy for the current winter season is predicted to reach – at best – no more than 25 per cent of its normal level.

The significance of this is that the Northern and Eastern provinces together form a major paddy-surplus area that produces approximately a quarter of the island's requirements of rice. Disruption in rice production here has major implications for the economy as a whole. In 1984 Sri Lanka came the closest yet to its goal of self-sufficiency in rice production, importing some 39,000 tonnes of rice. In the first six months of 1985, 90,000 tonnes were imported, and the amount for the year as a whole will reach approximately 200,000 tonnes at a foreign exchange cost of about one billion rupees.

If rice production in the Northern and Eastern provinces is 25 per cent of its normal level in 1986, there will be a shortfall of some 350,000 tonnes in the supply from these provinces alone which will have to be made up by imports, taking the likely level of imports over 400,000 tonnes and the cost well above two billion rupees. If 25 per cent production turns out to have been an overestimate, these figures will be still higher. Of course, it does not follow that these developments will be felt in the form of a food shortage – since those affected by such a shortage would include many outside the North and East it is likely that the government will attach high priority to maintaining rice imports at an ample level. To assess its ability to do so (especially when production of other crops will also have been hit) it is necessary to consider in detail Sri Lanka's foreign exchange constraints.

For Sri Lanka's economy 1984 was undoubtedly a bumper year overall due principally to a happy coincidence of high world tea prices and a large increase in domestic tea production that sent export earnings from tea up to Rs 15.8 billion, an increase of 9.4 billion or 149 per cent over 1982. The industrial sector also recorded a 15 per cent growth in output in 1984 (due to particularly strong growth in textiles, clothing and leather products); resulting in a Rs 3.8 billion or 43 per cent growth in export earnings.

As a result of this performance Sri Lanka was able to reduce its current account deficit from over Rs 11 billion in 1983 to just 347 million in 1984, its strongest showing in the post-1977 period. At the same time the government's budget deficit fell from Rs 21.6 billion to 15.9 billion, a relatively easy sum for a government to fund if it enjoys a net inflow of foreign finance of Rs 9.8 billion in the same year. In fact government borrowing from the banking system was negative in 1984 by over Rs 2 billion, because of the high domestic savings generated by the increased export earnings. So even a succession of high budget deficits in relation to overall government revenue cannot be said to have imposed either a foreign exchange constraint or any serious inflationary pressure upon the economy. The year-on-year inflation rate in June 1985 was 15.4 per cent and declining. The country's debt-service ratio in 1984 was a modest 15 per cent. It cannot be said that the deterioration of the ethnic conflict finds Sri Lanka in a macro-economically weak position.

Nonetheless, the favourable conjunction of economic circumstances has begun to change. International tea prices have fallen sharply since the beginning of 1985. Rubber and coconut prices have also had large falls since their high points in mid-1984. Remittances from migrant workers, which reached Rs 7.6 billion in 1984, appear to be near their peak as many Gulf countries near the end of their infrastructural development. There seems to be significant movement of resources out of the country by Tamil migrants, some of it in unaccounted forms.

The number of tourists entering Sri Lanka in the first half of 1985 was 13 per cent down on the same period in 1984, and 1984 itself saw a decline of 22 per cent from 1982.

The government budget announced by the Finance Minister on November 12, 1985 made provision for a deficit of over Rs 30 billion, or one half of total expenditure, due to measures such as a raising of defence expenditure to Rs 5.8 billion in 1986, up from Rs 3.4 billion in 1985. It is clearly of some importance to know whether such expenditures will be sustainable in the future.

It is too early still to hazard more than a guess – too much of the information needed to understand the costs of the crisis is not yet available. But much of the answer must depend upon whether Sri Lanka continues to enjoy its highly favoured status with its international creditors. There are signs that some, such as Canada, are becoming uneasy about their liberality given current conditions in the country.

A reputation for the liberal virtues tempered with a certain social justice was after all what won Sri Lanka its favour among Western governments and multilateral aid agencies in the first place. But some shuffling of the feet does not always herald a stampede, and in the absence of major pressure by Sri Lanka's creditors it may be over-optimistic to hope that sheer financial self-interest will induce the government into a serious negotiating position. It can doubtless afford to buy-off a food crisis next year, and perhaps a worse one the year after, and will believe it can afford the crisis in the short-term so long as it believes the crisis is soluble in the short-term by military means. If, as most outside observers think, a military solution is impossible as well as undesirable (impossible because of the inability of the Sri Lankan security forces to isolate the militants from the rest of the population), the government will have to be moved by a more careful consideration of its long-term interests than any it has shown itself willing to undertake so far.

Tamil Detainees As Human Shields!

The Citizens' Committee of Batticaloa and Amparai in east Sri Lanka have strongly condemned the Security Forces for detaining and using civilian Tamil hostages as 'human shields' for their own protection against attacks on them. Scantily clothed civilians are taken from camp to camp for this purpose.

A public meeting chaired by Rev. Fr. Chandra Fernando was held in the Batticaloa Catholic Association Hall on 4th November. The conduct of the Army in marching Tamil civilians all the way from Kokkadicholai to Batticaloa was severely criticised and condemned by several speakers including members of the Citizens' Committees. It was resolved that the Government and the National Security Minister should be requested to take suitable steps to ensure against a recurrence of such vile and inhuman acts by the Forces.

Speakers pointed out that in recent times it had become more frequent for the Security Forces to take Tamil civilians as hostages along with them in their search and combing-out operations.

The Citizens' Committee has addressed a memorandum regarding the matter to the President with copy to the National Security Minister.

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MEDIA FILE

'OPERATION' AFTERMATH

"Operation Disarm" or "Operation Tiger" whatever it is, the event has already taken place and there is no use tearing the hair or beating one's breasts over it. What has happened cannot be undone. It is just as well that Chief Minister MGR has promised the leaders of the Liberation Tigers an inquiry into their complaints about the humiliation to which they had been allegedly subjected.

Since the operation took place on 8th November, a plethora of statements have been made, hailing or decrying it, depending upon the individual angles. Those who fail the operation forget the point that none of the five militant groups, recognised by the Indian and Tamilnadu Governments as representatives of Tamil opinion in Sri Lanka, can be considered an enemy at war with this country. It is on record that the leaders of all the five groups fully cooperated with the 8th November operation without offering the least resistance. There is no point for anyone to crow over 'victory' in a battle that never was and never took place.

Statements of these types and comparison with events in Lebanon would only lead to insurmountable political complications, rendering more difficult the already difficult job of India's honest brokering. These militant groups are patriots, devoted to the cause of larger human rights. They can be denigrated only on pain of denigrating ourselves and disowning whatever this country has done to help our southern neighbour to resolve a long standing ethnic problem through political dialogue and patient negotiatons.

The whole affair is not a matter of police operation against a sort of anti-national or anti-social force. On the contrary, it concerns a sensitive political problem on the solution of which these very groups have to play a major role. Humiliating them and treating them as less than criminals may please some fascist and inhuman minds, but will certainly hurt the feelings of all right-thinking people.

We have no reservation in congratulating each of the five groups for remaining calm and unprovoked in the face of the bad treatment and insults heaped on it.

Indeed, these five groups have shown great political maturity and understanding. They should rest assured that all Indians have great admiration for them and their natural sympathies lie only with them. They carry with them the goodwill of all Indians for the victorious conclusion of their just struggle for human justice and a new socialist order which will benefit not only the Tamils, but also the Sinhalese in the island. They know Rajiv Gandhi and MGR very well. They should not think that these towering Indian leaders have changed their attitude towards them simply because something unfortunate had happened and things had been bungled somewhere along the line.

We have known most of the leaders of the five groups which count for a durable settlement of the ethnic problem. They too know us well, especially our own view that separation will never solve the problem in Sri Lanka and will only create more problems for all, especially for India which is in full sympathy with them and Sri Lanka which is temporarily estranged from them. Separation will be an invitation to the imperialist forces to continue their intrigues against both India and Sri Lanka. And subject to this reservation, we have fully supported the heroic struggle of the Tamil groups to roll back the genocidal attack stupidly mounted on the Tamil population on the island by the Jayawardene Government. We have always upheld the right of every citizen to defend himself when he is under attack from organised State-terrorism. Had he lived today, Mahatma Gandhi also would have approved of the resistance put up by the Tamil youngsters in Sri Lanka in the face of heavy odds. We are convinced that if the Sri Lankan Government talks of a negotiated settlement now, it is only because of the (successful and glorious) resistance offered by the Tamil youngsters to a ruthless military machine buttressed by anti-Indian forces. All the major groups have a great cause to serve and they should not be tempted to mistake a tree for the wood. The 8th November operation against them, deplorable though it is, does not amount to lack of sympathy for their cause on the part of Indians.

We urge our young friends to ponder deeply on one principal aspect of their functioning in this country. The inter-group rivalries among them often reach the point of stupidly involving the local people and arranging for agent provocateurs against one another. This kind of activity is bound to boomerang on all and will never be confined to any one group. It is not impossible for them to unite and weld a powerful force to achieve their common goal. In varying degrees, all the five groups which have taken part in the Thimpu talks claim to follow the teachings of the great Lenin. It is unfortunate that they forget how Lenin unified the various streams and created a powerful movement for the overthrow of an exploitative regime and its counter-revolutionary successor. At least, now the five groups should find a common platform and refrain from the suicidal policy of mutual liquidation. In all freedom struggles, the enemy within is more dangerous than the enemy outside who is well-identified.

We welcome New Delhi's stand that its efforts for finding a solution would continue and there is no change of policy, following the 8th November operation. At the same time, we cannot but notice the hiatus between what is professed and what is practised. New Delhi must realise that the wide publicity given to the humiliation of the political groups, which are considered important factors for a settlement by India, has led only to encouraging President Jayawardene into launching a more cruel military onslaught against all Tamils. This might not have been bargained for but it has been, nevertheless, the outcome of the operation. It is never too late to mend matters. New Delhi should reassure Tamil groups of the respect it has for them and do amends for what has been done.

More importantly, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi should make it clear to President Jayawardene that the 8th November operation was the outcome of an excessive obsession at a lower level with SAARC security and therefore his guest should not be tempted to rush to conclusions and intensify the military operations against innocent Tamils. India cannot remain silent when the Tamils are butchered in the neighbouring country and when thousands of Tamils keep pouring into this country, fleeing tyranny.

Given the history of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, it is foolish to think that administrative adjustments can ensure a certain measure of autonomy for the Tamil minority. The autonomy of the type that the Tamils need after their bitter experience cannot flow from the Gaullist Constitution of Sri Lanka which has perpetuated the Jayawardene regime in the island. It can flow only from a radical changing of the Constitution to make Sri Lanka a federal country, both in letter and spirit. The Prime Minister should not allow himself to be misled by easy comparisons drawn for him by the so-called pundits who are at best only adept in drawing comparisons between incomparables. This is the crux of the whole conflict and must be addressed squarely and with honesty by the Prime Minister. (Editorial, NEWS TODAY, 13.11.86)

Priest can't visit

"MY 86-YEAR-OLD MOTHER is on her death-bed. But the Minister of Justice has turned down my written request for permission to visit her", states Rev. Fr. Aparanam Singarayar in a letter to President Jayawardene about the denial of fundamental rights under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Fr. Singarayar is at present in remand custody in Welikade, indicted under the PTA in connection with the attack on the Chavakachcheri Police Station in 1982.

It is agonising, Fr. Singarayar points out in his letter to the President, that a Catholic priest should be denied permission to visit his dying mother.

Fr. Singarayar, it will be recalled, chose not to escape from the Batticaloa prison along with fellow-detenus, though he twice had the opportunity to do so. He has been in remand custody for four years. *Saturday Review, 22/11/86*

TAMIL EELAM

Continued from page 11

appreciative of his mother's policy towards the neighbouring countries. For the Tamils know that in such a situation they would not be the losers even if the Eelam for which they voted does not materialise.

The Tamil people, or at least a significant section among them, harboured illusions of India helping them to bring about an independent Tamil State – Eelam. Those illusions have been dispelled to a great extent now. The emphasis is now on a Tamil linguistic region.

In the meantime, opposition even to provincial councils is building up in the South. After the exposure gained by the Tigers in demonstrating their control over Jaffna and the rejection of the proposals by the militants in Madras, the groundswell of Sinhala opinion is very much in favour of a major assault on the Jaffna peninsula. A top army officer compared the Jaffna district to the head of a "terrorist snake", with two bodies running through the Northern and Eastern provinces. The head must be "smashed" to kill the snake, was the militaristic verdict.

The question on everyone's minds is: what will happen during the SAARC summit in Bangalore, when J.R. and Rajiv meet to talk about the Sri Lankan situation?

(Courtesy of Frontline, November 15-28, 1986)

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TRAVAILS OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

Text of a Press statement by the University Science Teachers Association, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

THE USTA strongly condemns the incidents of looting at gun point that have started to take place again in the Jaffna peninsula. The USTA is hopeful that the organisation that is working towards the upliftment of the Tamil community will take all possible steps to bring these unsocial elements that are engaged in these activities to book very early.

Those who are in control of law and order in the peninsula should consider it as their prime duty to protect every citizen of this land. Especially, they must protect those people who live in this land with the community to serve the community by sacrificing many of their personal benefits, although they could live in comfort in foreign countries.

In this regard, we note with deep regret the robbery which took place at gun point at the house of one of our colleagues, Professor Kumaravadivel, a few days ago and simliar incidents which took place at the houses of other colleagues some time ago.

It is our duty to let the public know the difficulties and constraints under which the Teachers in the Science Faculty of the Jaffna University are carrying out their duties. Out of an approved academic cadre of seventy nine in the Faculty of Science, we have only nineteen Teachers in the grade of Lecturer and above. It is because of the dedicated services of these Teachers that the Science Faculty of Jaffna University is still functioning. Each Teacher is carrying out the duties of four or five with the help of a few Assistant Lecturers. The staff shortage is not due to lack of funds. Funds have been allocated for the appointment of 79 Teachers in the Science Faculty but we are unable to find qualified Teachers who are willing to serve here. Forty five Teachers have resigned from their posts during 1975–1985.

Out of a total number of seventy-three Assistant Lecturers recruited to the Science Faculty of the University of Jaffna during this ten year period, only one is in service after obtaining a postgraduate degree. Although there are many qualified Sri Lankan Tamils living abroad, they do not come forward to serve their motherland. Poor salary, unsettled atmosphere and the political situation in Jaffna are the main reasons for their reluctance.

We hope that the public and the Organisations that work for the upliftment of the Community will see for themselves from the brief data given above, the difficulties of the Science Faculty of the Jaffna University and the dedicated services rendered by the few Teachers who are still under difficult conditions and poor salary.

Every University Teacher is striving to improve the educational standards of our Society. As far as the few scientists who still remain here are concerned, they are contributing much, for the upliftment of its people, sacrificing all the comforts they can easily get on foreign soil. Their struggle for improving the quality of Society will not end even when the struggle for its liberation ends. There cannot be an enemy of the Society worse than those who undermine the educationists and scientists within it. Incidents similar to that which happened to Professor Kumaravadivel, will only help to expedite the exodus of the remaining few scientists and educationists from this land.

We trust the general public and other organisations will take note of this and strive to eliminate incidents such as the one mentioned above.

"RECOGNISE TAMILS' RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION" – C.M.U.

THE FOLLOWING resolution was adopted by over a two-thirds majority, on a vote by ballot, by the 19th Delegates' Conference of the Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers' Union (CMU) held in Colombo from 17th to 19th October, 1986.

The 19th Delegates' Conference of the CMU considers that the conflict that is taking place in the Northern and Eastern provinces is not an 'ethnic conflict' but a conflict between the armed forces that have been sent to the Northern and Eastern Provinces by the Government, to suppress the political movement for the creation of an independent administration of the Tamil-speaking people in those two provinces, and those who are engaged in an armed struggle to achieve that objective.

It further considers that both the demand for the establishment of a separate state in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, under the name of "Tamil Eelam", and the armed struggle that has developed in pursuance of that demand, have resulted from the discriminatory policies that have been pursued in relation to the Tamil-speaking people in this country by successive parliamentary governments that have held office since the British Colonial administration ended in 1974. The attacks that have been perpetrated upon defenceless Tamil people at various times since 1958, culminating in the anti-Tamil "pogrom" of July 1983, which gave rise to world-wide horror and condemnation, and the repression and downright terrorism that has been inflicted upon the Tamil-speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces by the Police and the Armed Forces, under repeated States of Emergency proclaimed by successive governments, headed by the UNP and SLFP, since 1958.

Also considers that the Tamil-speaking people have the right to demand the establishment of an administration of their own in those parts of the country in which they have lived for centuries and in which they constitute the overwhelming majority of the population to this day, that is, they have democratic right of self-determination.

Therefore, declares that the conflict in the Northern and Eastern provinces should be brought to an end by the recognition of the right to self-determination of the Tamil-speaking people of the North and East, and the negotiation of a political settlement on that basis, with their representatives, including representatives of the groups of Tamil youth who are engaged in armed conflict with the Government's forces occupying the areas in which they live, which they regard quite justifiably as their traditional homelands, while in no way condoning attacks by any such group upon harmless people (whether Sinhala, Muslim or Tamil) in those areas, or killing or injuring of innocent people anywhere in the country, even in retaliation for atrocities of the armed forces or armed civilians against Tamil-speaking people.

Resolves that the Union should make every endeavour to mobilise opposition amongst the working people to the war policy that the Government is pursuing in the North and East.

REFUGEE MUST GO

A TAMIL refugee in Britain who tried to commit suicide in detention will be deported to India.

Sinnathamby Sivakumar tried to hang himself with a bedsheet on 27 October at Latchmere Remand Centre. He said that he was depressed because he had been detained for six months.

Thirty Sri Lankan Tamils are now being held in Britain and the Home Office has admitted that detention is being used as a sanction to discourage them coming here.

Sivakumar, 28, entered Britain with an Indian passport which he later admitted had been obtained by bribery. He applied for political asylum, saying that he was a militant Tamil.

He told immigration officials that he has now left the Tamil Group and feared to return to either Sri Lanka or India because he faced persecution.

Home Office Minister David Waddington has now decided that he should be returned to India. Last week he wrote to Islington North MP Jeremy Corbyn:

'Mr Sivakumar has recently become depressed whilst in detention, and is giving cause for concern, so it is obviously desirable not to detain him any longer than is necessary.'

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SIR P. RAMANATHAN

A STATESMAN PAR EXCELLENCE

Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan
(16.4.1851 to 30.11.1930)

by A. Theva Rajan

The variegated career of Sir P. Ramanathan and the effect of its influence on the socio-economic evolution of Sri Lanka from Colonial times to the present day are so wide and inextricably intertwined that it is difficult to portray all these aspects within the ambit of a small article. His birth, ancestral heritage and education and the offices he held have become glorified only through his selfless services. But for his unstinted services he would have died unwept and unsung. For, it is his devoted service to the nation that has distinguished him from his fellow men and colleagues. That is why after over a century we remember him with gratitude.

In the field of education he had revolutionary and radical thoughts. To put it in his own words, the educated youth "will issue forth from time to time in his intercourse with his less enlightened friends and thus exert an influence over others which gradually and without violence to their feelings or their prejudices will effect a change in their conduct." He further says that "he exerts also the political influence over the people of his district." He advocated the translation into the local languages viz: Sinhala and Tamil, the English books of utilitarian value. He further emphasised the aim of education thus:

"What the Sinhalese and the Tamil youth lack most is character. It is the duty of the Government to develop it. The youth of the country ought to be made to think on sound lines, without prejudice, wayward inclination or caprice."

He was not satisfied with the functions of the then existent affiliated University College. He demanded the establishment of an independent University for Ceylon. For, the aim of university education is not to produce academicians divorced from the socio-economic emancipation of the toiling rural masses. The university should cater to the economic advancement through a deep social consciousness. He further demanded the establishment of independent universities at the principal towns throughout the country.

It is now evident that his ambition or insight was not mere wishful thinking. It has devolved on the Government to give effect to his ambition today in that the idea of establishing more than one university to cater to the regional requirements of the country is a reality and indispensability. It is in a way relieving to note that one of his own educational institutions – viz. Parameshwara College of Jaffna was converted into the Jaffna University.

Working class

Ramanathan perhaps, was the first to voice the sentiments of the working classes. In his advocacy for the establishment of post office savings banks, he categorically pleaded that since the working masses were recklessly spiriting away their hard earned money, they should be helped to save by introducing the Savings Bank movement. He said in the Legislative Assembly thus:

"My motion has in view the welfare of the working classes. It is the duty of the Government to do all it can to improve their condition.

Truly wretched is the family that is not able to make both ends meet, but there are thousands of families whose earnings are in excess of its immediate wants, and it is the case of these families which the Government has to consider". He also advocated the ready payment of the dues to the workers on the estates. He pleaded for adequate medical aid to the workers who were subjected to various diseases, the worst of them being malaria. He said:

"The coolies represent labour, and the planters the capital; and the result of these two elements contribute greatly to the prosperity of the colony. By the labour of the coolies the planters are as benefitted as the colony itself. Why should the planters bear all the expenses themselves? The Government ought to share the cost of the scheme with the planters. That is nothing but fair." It is very necessary to note the words he has used – he has as far back as the so called Colonial times held the view that the worker is an indispensable participant in the economic struggle of a nation towards economic emancipation; and therefore it is binding on the State to look to the comforts of the workers.

Ramanathan was a great legal luminary. He held the post of Solicitor General before he entered politics.

With his abundant experience in law he made very valuable contributions on matters of legal interest in the Legislative Council. He urged several legal reforms and legislative acts which were translated into reality and most of them to this day hold good. He introduced the system of registration of titles of lands. He argued against Administrative or Executive Officers being charged with judicial duties. He said " . . . I believe that two different frames of mind are required for excellence in administrative as distinguished from judicial work. For administrative work you have to consider what are the most prompt and expedient methods of effecting your object, on the other hand, for judicial work, you have to consider what is legal and most formal method of effecting your object."

He condemned the process of summary trials by Police Magistrates and said that could lead to a miscarriage of justice. He also pleaded that there should be the right of appeal against a judgement delivered by the Police Magistrate so that the judges of the Higher Court who have had a wide experience in the field could view the judgement in a cool and calm atmosphere.

Contribution to Law

He embodied all judgements of importance delivered by the Higher Courts and published them and are called the Ramanathan Reports even to this day. This has led to the establishment of an independent judicial tradition in Sri Lanka.

Even recently the Privy Council banked on the Ramanathan Reports to decide on a vexed question as to whether a contract of service existed between the State and a Public Servant. In the case of Kodeswaran Vs. Attorney-General, the Privy Council based its judgement on a parallel case reported in the Ramanathan Reports and delivered its judgement. It would therefore not be extravagant to state that his contribution to the legal and judicial development of Sri Lanka is immense and immeasurable.

Public Servants

The public servant held office during the pleasure of the King or Crown. The employment could be terminated at the pleasure of the Crown. They did not have the right to appeal against even administrative actions of the Heads of Departments. They were an oppressed class within the working class. Officials of the General Post Office submitted a memorandum to Ramanathan and he tabled it in the Legislative Council. It outlined certain irregularities in the matter of pay and promotions and conditions of service.

The then Acting Colonial Secretary of State, Mr. R. F. Dick, made a preliminary objection saying that it is a grave breach of discipline for a body of public servants to petition the Legislative Council. Ramanathan pleaded for the public servants and won their battle. This is perhaps the first time the sentiments of the public servants were voiced in the Legislative Council and may be recorded as a landmark in the history of the Public Service in that it led to the awakening of a joint action and trade union movement.

The Riots of 1915 and the services of Ramanathan at that momentous hour can never be forgotten. It is worthwhile recapitulating the events in brief. A racial riot between the Sinhalese and Muslims broke out in Kandy and it went out of control and proportion. It spread throughout the country. Martial Law was clamped down and moves were afoot to try the offenders under special law in special courts. In the course of his plea he said:

"We have no reason whatever for believing that the Sinhalese people have been tainted with disaffection against their Government or their King, or are bent upon compassing evil for

Continued opposite

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the country". The leaders held under Martial Law included the late Mr. D. S. Senanayake. Even the death penalty was provided for and Ramanathan pleaded that they be tried under the normal law in the normal law courts of the country.

In a moving speech he made these observations:

"I assure you Sir, with all the emphasis that I am capable of, that you can rely on the Sinhalese people. Whatever other people may say, you can rely upon their loyalty and be certain that there will be no disturbance of the peace hereafter. I, who felt all this, am bound in duty to you and in justice to the Sinhalese to say that no special measures are necessary in future; that the time is now come for the withdrawal of the Martial Law and for the cessation of the operation of the Military Courts in the Island, and for entrusting the offenders or the alleged offenders to the ordinary Courts of Justice, to be dealt with by the normal law of the country . . . Is it really necessary that we should place on our Statute Book a measure so defamatory of the Sinhalese people as this Bill?

In London

All these pleas failed to move the determined rulers then resident in Ceylon who proceeded with their plans. World War I was going on and it was a life-risking voyage to England as mines were placed in the seas to damage warships.

However, Ramanathan was not prevented from going on his mission to England to canvass justice for the Sinhalese. He proceeded to England and presented his case which the Imperial Government accepted. They immediately ordered the local administrators to refrain from their new plans. On his return to Ceylon Ramanathan was taken in a chariot drawn by the Sinhalese leaders, some of whom may have been executed under the Martial Law. Soon after hearing this, the great savant Anagarika Dharmapala, wrote from Calcutta on October 21, 1915 thus:

"The day that you have been taken from Ceylon, from that day, there will be none to defend the poor, neglected Ceylonese. They are a doomed nation with none to guide and protect them. Unhappy Sinhalese!"

Ramanathan was the first to press for a Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance Bill in order to purify the Sangha and make the religion free of aberrations. He spoke at length on the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance Bill and later it became law. He also pressed the Government to declare Wesak day a public holiday. The Sarasavi Sandesa of May 29th, 1889, made the following observations:

"The Buddhists as a national sect owe Mr. Ramanathan a deep debt of gratitude. His interest in the question of the Wesak holiday and the Buddhist Temporalities Bill, his encouraging words to the students of the Pali College and Theosophical Society and a host of services to Buddhism have endeared him immensely to the Buddhists of Ceylon".

Sinhala

Ramanathan deplored the sad neglect of the Sinhalese language by the Sinhalese themselves. At the prize distribution day at Ananda College (whose centenary was recently celebrated) on 3rd September, 1904 in the presence of Olcott he made these salient observations:

"I have asked these denationalised Sinhalese gentlemen 'Will you tell me what constitutes a Sinhalese man?' Not knowing the answer they have remained silent. I then asked them 'Do you take delight in speaking the beautiful Sinhalese language at your homes, and among your friends met in railway carriages and other places, and on public platforms?' They feebly smiled.

The other day I was travelling in a railway carriage where I met four or five Sinhalese gentlemen of first rank, and the party included a Sinhalese lady. I found them all engaged in speaking the English language. Ah me! If the Sinhalese lips will not speak the Sinhalese language, who else is there to speak it?" A language that is not in usage is a useless language. Like all good linguists he advocated the use of the language and stressed the need to foster the local languages. He drew attention to Western countries and deplored the wave of denationalisation that was fast encroaching the strata of the educated and elite society.

He was a true nationalist and true statesman who went above the considerations of caste, creed or race. He drew inspiration for all his activities from the great personality of the century, Arumuga Navalar, who first dragged him into politics. He was learned in the great literatures of the Tamil language as well. He believed that Tamil culture could best be fostered and preserved in a Hindu and Tamil environment and established two schools – one for girls, Ramanathan College at Chunnakam and another for boys, Parameshwara College (now University of Jaffna) at Thirunelvely. He also built in Dravidia architecture, a Sivan Temple at Kochchikade, Colombo, named Ponnambalavaneswarar Kovil. He wrote a book on Tamil grammar in Tamil and also compiled a Tamil dictionary.

When the Donoughmore Commission recommended the abolition of communal representation, Ramanathan opposed it vigorously envisaging an inevitable oppression of the national minorities in course of time. Ramanathan never wished to sacrifice the interest of his community for favour of positions or flattery. He worked for the whole nation with the dictum that all were equal citizens of Ceylon.

He was a nationalist cum statesman par excellence. He stated in the Legislative Council: "It is true that I represent the Tamils here, but it cannot be said that during any part of my legislative career I have looked to the Tamil interests only, to the detriment of other interests."

Further in protest against his being introduced to an Englishman as a Sinhalese he roared in the Assembly thus:

"I pose before the world as a Sinhalese! What do I gain by it? I have no desire to change my nationality. I pride myself on being a Tamil. I hope a Sinhalese gentleman will pride himself upon being a Sinhalese and an Englishman on being English."

Ramanathan stood for national unity and he showed what it meant. It was not preferential treatment to a numerically strong group demanding sacrifices (fantastically in the name of national unity) of a numerically weaker group . . . National unity is the unity of thought that espouses mutual recognition of the constituent citizens of a nation or state.

It is that recognition of equality of constituent citizens, that Ramanathan espoused. It is obvious that Ramanathan, while he championed the cause of the Sinhalese, did not disparage or undermine the cause of the Tamils. He stood for equality and fought as an equal.

ISRAEL STRENGTHENS LANKAN NAVY

AN ISRAELI SUPPLIER has won a contract from the Sri Lankan defence ministry for a supply of eight "Super Dwora" class naval craft, according to press reports in Colombo.

The "Super Dwora" class craft would be faster and more powerful than the existing "Dwora" class fleet of six craft, *Colombo daily Sun* said. It said that an Israeli supplier had won the contract over a supplier from South Korea who "also offered competitive terms".

The "Super Dwora" class attack craft were acquired to strengthen security in Sri Lankan waters in the Palk Straits "in a bid to prevent militant groups from infusing men and material into the country", The daily said.

A considerable amount of defence expenditure would go to strengthen the Sri Lankan navy, The Sun said, adding that with the deployment of Dwora class patrol boats, naval patrols have had repeated successes "including detection of arms caches and arrests of militants".

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WEDDING

KARUNENDRAN – PREMADEVI

The wedding took place on the 18th October, at Vannarponnai of Mr. S. C. Karunendran and Miss Premadevi Kathirgamanathan.

The bridegroom is a son of the late Mr. P. Selvanayagam, former Assistant Registrar, University of Jaffna and Mrs. P. Selvanayagam and the bride a daughter of Mr. A. S. Kathirgamanathan and the late Mrs. Kathirgamanathan of Alvay.

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IN MEMORIAM

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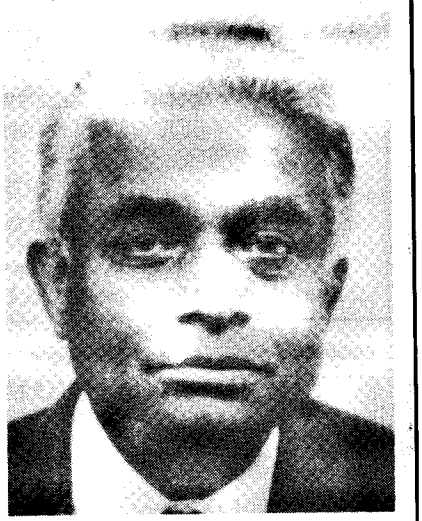
DR. T. THAMBYAHPILLAI

(Research Fellow, Imperial College)

who passed away on December 4, 1984.



"As our dear father passed away
A gloomy scene came on its way,
And we feel sad from that day on,
Wishing he would come back to us,
Everyday we think of him,
Waiting for the door bell ring,
And see him enter with a loving smile,
How we wish it was all a dream"
Sivakamasunthari and Shiyamalanayagi

"In silence and tears we remember you,
You walk beside us everyday"

So sadly missed and dearly loved by his wife Meenalosani and children.

OBITUARIES

Miss Barbara Atkins

Miss Atkins former Principal of the Kalmunai Girls Boarding School and Head of the Orphanage, and later in charge of the Christa Illam in Kalmunai, died on 3rd December.

Her funeral took place on the 9th in Roxby, Scunthorpe, South Humberside. "Atkins Amma" served as a Methodist Missionary in the Eastern Province for 36 years (1938–74). She will be remembered with affection and gratitude for the pioneering work she undertook on behalf of the poor and dispossessed of all communities in the Kalmunai District.

THAMBOO BALASINGAM
(Chankanai)

husband of Kanthimathy (neé Thillaiampalam), father of Jana & Haran, brother-in-law of Sivaramalingam (Chesham, UK), Srikanthan, Sri Pathe, Sritharan, Kannan, Mrs Wijedeivendran, Mrs Manickasingam, Mrs Vairavanathan, Mrs Shanmugam (all of Boston, USA).

Died 4 December, 1986, in Boston.
8 Ellsworth Road, Somerville, Mass. 02145, USA.

J. C. Nallathamby, Retd. Station Master (C.G.R.). "Nesa Vasa", Point Pedro.

Dr. V. Rajapillai, Retd. Pathologist, Govt. Hospital, Jaffna. Later Consultant, Kaduna Hospital, Nigeria and till recently Lecturer, North Ceylon Private Medical College, Moolai. Alolai Lane, Vaddukoddai.

Pastor Ranjit Ponnuthurai, formerly of Ceylon Pentecostal Mission Faith Home, Wimbledon, London.

Benedict Lawrence, Teacher St. Patricks College, Jaffna, for over 25 years.

Ponnambalam Vipulananthan, 17 years, 'A' level student and prefect, Jaffna Central College, killed at school by gun fire from Jaffna Fort, 30 October.

Mrs. Jayanthy David

The death occurred at Samanthurai (EP) of Jayanthy (36) wife of V. R. David, Dental Surgeon, Government Hospital, Samanthurai and daughter of Mr. George Stephen and Mrs. Freda Stephen of Love Lane, Uduvil.

Jayanthy leaves behind her parents and husband, her twin sister, Vamalanthy and brothers Jeyakumar, Eric, Sathian and Felix.

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HINDU PRIEST FEIGNS DEATH

A young Hindu priest from Mulliyawalai (Mullaitivu District) managed to deceive the Security Forces and save his life by playing possum.

Now warded at the General Hospital, Jaffna, Kasinathar Krishnarajah (25) of Kanukerni East, Mulliyawalai told the SATURDAY REVIEW the story of his ordeal.

On 21st November round about 6 a.m. he said, a helicopter hovering over the area dropping handbills announced that a curfew was being imposed from 6.30 a.m.

The handbills urged the people to leave their homes and go to schools and temples. Krishnarajah then started walking towards the Mulliyawalai Vithiyananda. On the way he learnt that youths who had gathered at this school were being singled out and taken away by the Army. Then Krishnarajah and Gopalasingham, a friend of his, started walking towards Wattapalai in search of shelter. Two other boys followed them on bicycles.

While approaching Wattapalai junction, Krishnarajah received gunshots on his right arm and thigh and fell down. His companion Gopalasingham, was shot in the chest and died on the spot. Army personnel also fired at the two boys on bicycles. One of them died on the spot. The army personnel then dragged Gopalasingham's corpse into the jungle. Krishnarajah was ordered to follow them and did so. The other cyclist who was injured was dragged to the spot where Krishnarajah was. (Gopalasingham was a final year Science Student of the University of Jaffna.)

Army personnel gave both of them first aid and told them they would be taken to hospital by helicopter. Krishnarajah and the other injured boy were lying on the ground when the Army prepared to move out round about 12.30 p.m. Suddenly one of the soldiers came up to Krishnarajah and, placing his feet on the fallen man's chest, trampled it. Then another soldier came near and opened fire at Krishnarajah and the injured boy. The latter died on the spot.

Krishnarajah saved his skin – though not his wristlet – by pretending to be dead. A soldier snatched Krishnarajah's wristlet, before the Army personnel left the scene. Krishnarajah later managed to get on to the road. Some people who saw him, took him to a Private Clinic where his wounds were dressed.

The next day he came by bus to Jaffna and got himself admitted to the General Hospital. Krishnarajah told the "Saturday Review" that he learnt later that Army personnel had been lying in ambush in the jungles close to the Wattapalai junction.

(By courtesy of Saturday Review, 29/11/86)

TWO SHOT DEAD, 200 ARRESTED

19.11.86 – In the course of a cordon and search operation by the Sri Lankan security forces at Valaichenai in east Sri Lanka, two Tamil civilians were shot and killed. About 200 persons were taken into custody at Morkottanchenai, and another ten were arrested at Amparai.

The arrested were subjected to forced labour in the army camps, according to sources close to the local Citizens' Committee.

Wisdom Is But A Whisper . . .

WE CARRY elsewhere in this issue an independent and forthright expression of what one could consider an honest opinion among the intelligentsia of Sri Lanka, not merely of the Sinhala community. Bewildered civilians on either side of the conflict, both Sinhalese and Tamils, have had to only stand and stare at the crass ineptitude and vengeful bloodletting in a conflict that has crippled the country and virtually ruined its economy for over three years now and to recoup from which unborn generations will no doubt have to struggle. The present generation and its leaders endowed with a singular lack of foresight, our politicians always with an eye to cheap popularity irrespective of moral considerations or convictions, the large majority of a community blissfully apathetic to the torments and persecution of a minority, their own brethren, simply crying out to have their wrongs redressed, their fundamental freedoms restored: these are sins which neither history nor succeeding generations will ever forgive. Our patrons and militarists have truly earned the curse.

In this bleak atmosphere prevailing in the Paradise Isle of Sri Lanka, it is heartwarming to listen to the whispers of wisdom faintly emanating from the Sinhala sector whose voice has long been either stilled, even absent and construed unconcerned. If intelligent opinion has failed to express itself at crucial times like this, when the common run of humanity seems to have lost its bearings, it has indeed failed in its duty to the public at large and the country as a whole.

Reggie Siriwardene and his small band of intellectuals are only lone voices crying out in the wilderness, their words of caution and wisdom lost on their countrymen more attuned to the chauvinistic emotive appeals of self-centred politicians and the sabre-rattling of an infamous bunch of unenlightened prelates who understood not the words of the Lord Buddha while the hoodlums wreaked havoc with their benediction by pillage and plunder, all in a vainglorious attempt at national and patriotic effort. The baneful and malicious propaganda let loose on the unsuspecting public, indoctrinated over the past 30 years through a servile press and state departments of organised clannish activity throughout this period are again part and parcel of a conspiracy that has resulted in the confrontation that is now shaking the country by its very roots. In retrospect we the Sri Lankans deserved the governments we got for our apathy in distancing ourselves from righteous issues, particularly when these did not either harm or even seem to advance our individual prospects albeit it denied our own brethren the very same rights we sought to preserve for ourselves. This is the inescapable tragedy, which is now haunting us.

The only atonement therefore is for free and honest men to stand up and be counted.

Christmas Message To The Tamil Times

WHEN JESUS was born he came into a world where there was violence and murder. We read in the Gospels of how Herod killed the new born babies and of how there was "wailing and loud laments". Jesus's parents themselves had to flee from the wrath of the king and it was only when Herod died that Joseph and Mary returned with baby Jesus to their home in Nazareth.

2,000 years later the scene has not changed very much. The world is full of violence and killings. Even today people have had to flee from their own homelands and find refuge elsewhere. The travails of the young men and women who were willing to hazard their lives on the high seas as they fled from Germany to Canada help to heighten the plight of many people around the world in similar situations.

There are thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils scattered all over the world due to the ethnic conflict. There are many who even today cry out for help from Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Jaffna. Only yesterday I had a desperate call from a young lady who said that her parents, brothers and sisters are in danger of their lives in Trincomalee and could I help to enable them to migrate elsewhere. One is helpless in the face of such pleas.

I was in Colombo a couple of weeks ago. Whilst the local newspapers report the killings that are going on in the northern and eastern provinces, life in Colombo and the rest of the island goes on oblivious of what is happening in that part of the island. This apparent lack of concern and in a sense indifference saddened me. ***To me there did not seem to be an awareness or an urgency about the deepening crisis in the island.***

In the midst of all these trials and tribulations what is the message of Christmas? The message is that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son". God loved this world – this world was not abandoned by God. It is a world that God loves. And a world in which all of us are called to reflect that love.

There is a concrete way in which each one of us can help by showing this love. There are many of our fellow country people who are in desperate need. When I was in Colombo I was told of thousands of families who have had to flee from Trincomalee into Jaffna and who are urgently in need of food, clothing and shelter. Churches and other voluntary agencies are doing their best. Your contributions will strengthen them at this time.

Please send your contributions earmarked 'For refugee rehabilitation' and send your cheques in favour of the Methodist Church, Sri Lanka to Mr. J. Rajasingham, Secretary for Finance, Methodist Church, 2 Station Road, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka or to me (7 Fairacres, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 8AN). Your cheque should be made in favour of the London Tamil Congregation and your gifts will be forwarded by me.

Wish you all a happy Christmas and every blessing in the New Year.

S. M. Jacob, Hon. Pastor, London Tamil Congregation *8 December 1986*

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